



INVESTIGATING THE SOCIAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL EFFECTS OF
CYBERBULLYING AMONG ADOLESCENT GIRLS.
A CASE STUDY OF AN ALL-GIRLS HIGH SCHOOL IN

DURBAN.

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Declaration.

I Nomusa Nkosi, hereby declare that the work submitted is entirely my own unless so indicated in the text and that no part of this work has been submitted for a degree at any other University. However, I have used Grammarly for paraphrasing.

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Acknowledgements.

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Abstract.

Cyberbullying has become a topical issue among school learners in South Africa. Due to modern technological innovations, aggressive behaviours have expanded into cyberspace, creating a new matter of public concern: cyberbullying. Antisocial and aggressive behaviours, including bullying, are characteristic of children and adolescents. This study begins by offering a broad overview of cyberbullying and its effects on students, schools, and education. It does so through a comparative approach, examining the prevalence of this issue both globally and specifically within South Africa. This problem impacts both pupils and educational institutions, as an increasing number of children and adolescents engage with smartphones and are present online.

The study aims to examine the concept of cyberbullying and how it is perceived by the adolescents involved, identify common terminology associated with cyberbullying among adolescents, and analyse its social and psychological impact. The challenge with cyberbullying is that it lies in the fact that information can be disseminated to anyone with access to technology, allowing it to be viewed multiple times and even shared further by others. Given the availability of the internet, many young people resort to this method of bullying, as they are consistently connected to their electronic devices.

A qualitative study was conducted in an all-girls High School in Durban, which aimed at investigating cyberbullying among adolescent girls. The study sample is made up of 10 participants, three perpetrators and seven victims, purposive sampling was used to identify the participants within the school. Data generation involved individual focus interviews, and data was analysed using thematic analysis. The study used social learning theory to understand adolescent experiences of cyberbullying and how cyberbullying is perpetrated. The findings indicate that cyberbullying is a serious problem at the school and has a negative impact on the wellbeing of children, and these adolescents lack understanding of the phenomenon. Children emerged as social actors who were able to provide insight into the kinds of bullying they experienced and how they constructed ‘cyberbullying’ as a phenomenon. The study was able to capture the reality of the adolescent’s experiences of the complex power-laden spaces and places of cyberbullying in the school.

List of Acronyms and Abbreviation.

A	Adolescent.
B	Bystanders.
FB	Facebook
IG	Instagram
SC	Snapchat
TT	TikTok
CB	Cyberbullying.
CV	Cyber-Victimization.
CP	Cyber-Perpetration.
SLT	Social learning theory.
SCT	Social cognitive theory.
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation.
CJCP	Centre for Justice and crime prevention.
SADAG	South African Depression and Anxiety Group.
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund.
POPIA	Protection of Personal Information Act.

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CHAPTER ONE: RESEARCH OVERVIEW.

1.1 Introduction.

Bullying is characterised by persistent physical or emotional aggression, such as humiliation, teasing, mockery, harassment, violence or the threat of violence, social exclusion, and the spread of rumours (Reddy, 2023). It can occur in a variety of settings, including schools, after-school programs, and even the youth's neighbourhoods. It has an impact on individuals, families, schools, and society at large. It can make young people feel helpless, vulnerable, intimidated, and humiliated by their peers' aggressive behaviour (Limo, 2015). It is described by intentional behaviour aimed at injuring a person, and is characterised by imbalance of power and repetition, making it impossible for an injured party to protect themselves (Smith et al., 2019).

Bullying is detrimental and has far-reaching effects on the victim, the perpetrators, and even on bystanders (Tshikalange, 2021). It can have detrimental long-term and short-term repercussions on all individuals involved (Smith, Bauman, & Wong, 2019:1) as stated by Shumba (2023). Both victims and perpetrators may experience harmful psychological repercussions from these impacts (Jankowiak, 2024). An estimated 50–80% of young people are still impacted by bullying in schools, despite a substantial body of research and government guidelines aimed at reducing bullying (Johnson, 2014). However, the number of young teenagers using phones, and the internet excessively has increased leading to a new kind of bullying known as cyberbullying. Cyberbullying can be defined as repeatedly and deliberately damaging someone using digital technologies, aggressive behaviours have spread into cyberspace due to recent technology advancements and the ability to interact with people virtually (Tozun, 2018). Cyberbullying is arguably more damaging to victims than traditional bullying because substantial information can be swiftly uploaded and widely disseminated online for others to view, thus making the effects of cyberbullying greater than that of traditional bullying (Reddy, 2023).

In a study conducted by Farhangpour, Maluleke, and Mutshaeni (2019), 52 (65%) of the 80 participants in Limpopo High School South Africa received aggressive text messages, 49 (61%) received hurtful remarks because of their background, 48 (60%) received pictures of parts of their body, 48 (60%) were called derogatory names, 47 (59%) were teased, and 42 (55%) were purposefully ignored by their peers. Of these, 54 (68%) were victims of sexual

harassment, in which the bully posted offensive sexual images or videos on social media because they spend most of their time online. Children and young people are more at risk of cyberbullying due to the rise in internet use and social media platforms like Facebook, and X. This type of bullying illuminates the potential inherent traits of bullying because it involves less face-to-face interaction and less accountability, human nature's darkest tendencies go unbridled when there is no visible victim, few social variables, little to no deterrents, and frequently no onlookers prevent this behaviour. Under the guise of cyber-anonymity, any student can easily spread racist or bigoted messages (Huston, 2018). The lack of face-to-face interaction can diminish empathy among individuals, leading them to act more aggressively than they would in person. Furthermore, many students exhibit reluctance to report incidents due to fear of retaliation or social stigma, which perpetuates a cycle of silence and victimization (Chan et al., 2022). Both authors (Huston 2018 & Chan et al., 2022), seem to agree that the lack of face to face causes the perpetrators to be aggressive than they would have been in person.

According to a study by Reddy (2018), cyberbullying continues to be a significant problem for social media users (Chukwuere, 2021), goes on stating that cyberbullying has been receiving more and more research attention in recent years because of the detrimental effects it has on social media users. A recent issue that cyberbullying, often known as online bullying disproportionately affect girls online and boys in person is cyberbullying. Cyberbullying is a new tool in the hands of the persistent bully, even though older forms of bullying are still common (Smith et al., 2019:1).

Cyberbullying is a new form of bullying that involves the use of "information and communication technologies to repeatedly and intentionally harm, harass, hurt, and/or embarrass a target," according to Peter & Petermann's (2018:359) in a study, which was mentioned by Shumba (2023). The prevalence of smartphones and other electronic devices that provide access to the Internet puts school-aged social media users at higher risk of engaging in cyberbullying (Cohen-Almagor, 2020, p. 76). About 80% of South African children experienced bullying in 2019 both at school and on their journey to and from school (Mahabeer, 2020, p. 3). Three years later, Shumba (2023) supported and cited these findings, suggesting that there has not been a lot of changes.

Cyberbullying is a rising global issue, and in South Africa, it has increased due to COVID-19. Furthermore, 54 percent know of a child in their community who has experienced cyberbullying. Cyberbullying can take many different forms, such as threatening messages, stalking, sharing images and videos, intimidating, and circulating rumours. According to Network (2023), all of this is intended to damage the victim's sense of self-worth and social status, and it may go on for a while (Mkhize et al., 2020). Cyberbullying is more likely to be classified as bullying or harassment (Sacco et al., 2012:5). If an instance of cyberbullying goes unreported to the proper authorities; in that scenario, a single post might remain available for years after the crime occurs. This could result in long-term abuse of the victim or victims because of the post's permanence. In line with the research conducted by (Wolak et al., 2007), which was cited by Gopal (2021). The impact of cyberbullying is greater than that of traditional bullying because the perpetrator is concealed Hinduja and Patchin (2010), referenced by Gopal (2021).

Cyberbullying can be defined as a hostile behaviour carried out with the intention of causing harm and utilizing information and communication technologies (Juneyoung, 2017). Cyberbullying is a severe problem that affects people everywhere, including in South Africa. South Africa has the highest rate of cyberbullying worldwide, with 51% of South African teenagers reporting having been bullied, according to an Ipsos survey conducted in 2018. They added that it is greater than the 37% global average. The Network (2023) posits that cyberbullying has an impact on mental health and general well-being, which makes it a worthwhile research topic. The study will contribute by engaging with the perpetrators as well, which is not a common practice among researchers. This dissertation will help define cyberbullying, explore why do teenagers engage in cyberbullying, explore the perspective/experiences of the perpetrators, explore the understanding of the phenomenon among adolescents, offer statistics on teenage cyberbullying, and explore the social and psychological effects of cyberbullying among adolescents.

Hinduja and Patchin (2017), intentional, destructive, and repetitive acts performed using computers, smartphones, and other electronic devices are all included in cyberbullying. People may now mingle, connect, learn, and make the most of their leisure time thanks to the internet's widespread usage. However, it also lays the groundwork for negative behaviours like cyberbullying (Kim et al., 2017; Englander et al., 2017). (Patchin and Hinduja 2017) adds that teens who experience cyberbullying are more likely to have social anxiety and

sadness. Additionally, cyberbullying elicits feelings of uncertainty, anxiety, anger, and shame, all of which are linked to interpersonal violence in teenagers. Because social networks are so easily accessible, the internet has been linked to an increase in aggressive behaviours at younger ages (Hinduja and Patchin 2017). Arias, Buendi, and Fernandez (2018) and Henning, Cuesta, Fernandez, and Dorival (2019), seem to agree with these authors findings on the increased in aggressive behaviours at younger ages being linked to the internet. Other risky behaviours like sexting and cyber grooming are also linked to cyberbullying. Specifically, cyberbullying is influenced by social media use including Facebook (Hennig et al., 2019).

The main difference between cyberbullying and traditional bullying is that for cyberbullying the crime scene is no longer limited to the schoolyard because of sophisticated technological communication and information capabilities. This implies that anyone, from anywhere in the globe, can harass someone else (Cagirkan, 2021). The phrase "online harassment" refers to a wide range of behaviours used to threaten, harm, or disparage a person or group. Traditional bullying occurs on school grounds, and it involves face-to-face encounter with the bully, which increases the likelihood of physical harm (Boniel-Nissim, 2019). Several negative outcomes, including strained relationships, poor health, and a general deterioration in civil discourse, justice, and welfare, have been connected to online harassment (Schoenebeck, 2021).

Researchers can conceptualize online behaviour and cyberbullying using the "five Cs" framework proposed by (Valcke et al., 2011). The first C denotes the online environment in which students spend their time. Forty percent of South Africans use social media. With 53% of all people utilizing it, Facebook is the most widely used platform. Snapchat (3%), Instagram (9%), and LinkedIn (18%) these are the most popular platforms, followed by X (4%) and WhatsApp. These South African Internet users may be impacted by cyberbullying. The social ties or online contacts that students have formed on social media are represented by the second C. Concerns regarding cyberbullying are raised by the fact that students are likely to be active users of at least one social network since they enjoy using social media for communication and interaction with friends and family. The third and fourth C's covers the way students manage their online privacy and conduct themselves when using the internet, including self-control and technological skills (Cilliers, 2021).

The growing relationship between cyberbullying and school among teenagers is a result of their greater use of digital communication. Cyberbullying has spread throughout the school (Myers, 2019). Many instances of cyberbullying start in the offline social context of the school, where the victims are typically young people who know one another from school. Bullying perpetrators may unintentionally elevate their adversaries above themselves, making them the objects of bullying (Malamut et al., 2022). Victims of bullying may come to learn that perpetration is a path toward perceived popularity if not peer acceptance; (Strindberg et al., 2020) and begin bullying others less powerful than themselves (Camacho, 2022).

The literature claims that there are three fundamental roles in cyberbullying: perpetrators, victims, and bystanders. Depending on the situation, people may switch between these roles, because their actions and emotions have the power to alter the course of events, bystanders typically occupy a pivotal position among these roles, as noted by (Tsikalane, 2021), the bullying and its detrimental effects on the parties involved. According to surveys, cyberbullying is more common among girls than boys and is most common among those aged 15 to 16 (The Harris Poll People, 2007). (Smith et al., 2006) concur that girls are much more likely than boys to experience cyberbullying, particularly through text messages and phone calls, these findings were also cited by Agbeko (2018). Since cyberbullies can remain anonymous and invisible, their actions are indirect rather than in-person. Compared to repeated traditional bullying acts, a single cyberbullying activity can snowball quickly and be duplicated by a larger audience (Peprah, 2023). Additionally, a study conducted by (Dean, 2020), agree that people use a range of social media sites; according to reports, the average social media user has roughly nine accounts globally, which makes cyberbullies remain anonymous. People from a variety of demographic backgrounds use social media platforms. According to study by the Pew study Centre (2018).

The way people interact has changed because of technological advancements and digital breakthroughs like the internet. In addition, allowing these advancements and permeating many aspects of society, they have also led to oppression and transgression and increased the prevalence of various types of abuse (Peprah, 2023). Peprah further states that evidence of online abuse, such as social media apps (Facebook, WhatsApp, emails, Instagram, YouTube), and online portals, demonstrate how traditional bullying has evolved into cyberbullying victimization and broadened its reach beyond physical environments and there is no denying the connection between traditional bullying and what occurs online. Most kids who

experience cyberbullying also experience bullying at school. Scholars that have studied bullying and cyberbullying discover a strong correlation between the two behaviours, indicating at least a significant degree of co-morbidity (Englander, 2019).

Cyberbullying is a type of bullying that has grown to be a major problem with grave repercussions that affects many teenagers who use electronics like laptops or cell phones, as technology develops and most teenagers have access to it, this type of bullying has increased in frequency Holfeld and Mishna (2019, p. 567). He continued saying that the most troublesome aspect of cyberbullying is that material is shared with anyone with internet access, and the recipients are free to view it as often as they choose. A child's self-esteem is frequently negatively impacted by cyberbullying, which frequently takes place when teenagers are still developing and trying to figure out who they want to be (Holfed and Mishna, 2019), he continued saying teenagers who find it difficult to maintain friendships and supportive peers are frequently the focus of bullying, which subsequently diminishes their affect or sense of self. One may envision a young adult who has experienced cyberbullying developing mental health issues that impact their ability to adjust to life, or perpetrators developing into young adults who may turn into sociopaths in society, as stated by (Steyn and Singh, 2018).

Bullying is stressful and has painful repercussions that are detrimental to an individual's well-being, which is why the high prevalence of bullying in South African schools in recent years is cause for significant worry. With an emphasis on the psychological and social components of bullying, this dissertation aims to elaborate on bullying from two general perspectives: online bullying and cyberbullying in educational settings. Bullying at school is when someone continuously harasses pupils in a power-imbalance relationship using physical or verbal assault. Most violence happens in schools and other areas where teens congregate and is a violent activity involving kids as participants (Li, 2021).

The social and psychological effects of cyberbullying on high school learners are very deep and very extensive (Nkwanyana, 2025). The social aspect can be described as a broad term describing human relationships, interactions or societal ties. For example, friendships or companionships and it includes verbal and non-verbal communication. For the students who are the targets of these bullying behaviours, the experience is distressing and hurtful in the short term. However, some persons might suffer long-term harm to their academic career and

mental health. The victim of bullying often isolates themselves from their peer groups and experiences a decline in self-esteem societal components (Myers, 2019). However, Myers notes that research indicates these victims have detrimental long-term impacts on social skills, mental health, and antisocial behaviour. (Rodriguez and Hidalgo, 2020), seems to agree that high levels of antisocial behaviour seem to be associated with high levels of involvement as a cyber-victim, cyber-aggressor, or cyberbullying observer. Children who are bullied tend to be shy, introverted, have few friends, and have low self-esteem are also labelled as "different." according to UNESCO (2017).

Aspects of psychology include self-esteem, body image, cognitive variables, and emotional state that affect personal well-being. The contemporary world is growing increasingly digital. Teenagers are more likely to engage in cyberbullying because of the significant increase in their online communication over the previous 20 years. Social exclusion, severe depression, substance abuse, suicidal thoughts or attempts, or actual suicide are among the most serious outcomes, but the victims suffer the most from these effects, which are linked to serious social, psychological, educational, and health problems for all parties involved (Calmaestra, 2020).

In South Africa, school children are increasingly experiencing cyberbullying at a startling rate (Burton and Mutongwizo, 2009), as cited by Cilliers (2021), carried out the first study on cyberbullying in South Africa in 2009 and discovered that 16.9% of students reported bullying through text messages and 18.3% reported bullying through voice calls, and the study also found that when students are the targets of cyberbullying, they will use one of two tactics. They choose to ignore the situation or ask a peer for assistance. Neither strategy includes asking an adult, such a parent, for assistance (Cilliers, 2020). A study conducted by (Zuze et al., 2016) states that there is often a link between school and community violence, Schools situated in high-crime and gang-violence neighbourhoods had a higher prevalence of bullying events, Given that 50% of children from lower socioeconomic backgrounds are likely to experience bullying at their schools on a weekly basis, these researchers say there is cause for concern over the association between bullying and socioeconomic position. Larger class sizes, less focus on education, insufficient safety and disciplinary measures, and higher student-teacher ratios could all be blamed for this. Skhakhane (2018), concurs with the aforementioned authors by, stating that the high levels of bullying and violence that kids

encounter in their communities frequently reflect bullying and violence in South African schools.

Although that may be the case, a new class of creative people known as "creators" has arisen because of social media platforms like YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok. Millions of people can view the content that these producers, storytellers, gamers, entrepreneurs, and influencers regularly share online. However, in addition to the increasingly lucrative opportunities for content creation, creators are more vulnerable to hate speech and abuse in the public sphere of social media (Thomas, 2022). Thomas further notes that Teens are creating a lot of content, and the widespread use of social media platforms has enabled a wide range of artistic endeavours, cyberbullying is one such risk connected to these artistic endeavours. Social media celebrities with large fan bases on platforms like YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok known as "content creators" are more susceptible to hate speech and online harassment.

1.2. Correlation between cyberbullying and schools.

The growing relationship between cyberbullying and school among teenagers is a result of their greater use of digital communication. Cyberbullying has spread throughout the school (Myers, 2019). As per the research conducted by (Smith et al., 2008). Many instances of cyberbullying start in the offline social context of the school, where the victims are typically young people who know one another from school.

Nonetheless, it is understandable that cyberbullying and offline bullying are related. Most children who encounter cyberbullying also encounter bullying at school. The findings of research on bullying and cyberbullying indicate a considerable association between the two behaviours, suggesting at least a significant degree of co-morbidity (Englander, 2019). Networks have made it feasible for bullying to occur in private and public places outside of the classroom through cyberbullying. According to (Waasdorp and Bradshaw, 2015), as cited by (Cáceres-Reche, 2019). The Internet has caused a rise in aggressive behaviours at earlier ages since children have easy access to mobile devices and lack the self-control to develop a social network profile, as per Cuesta, Fernández, Hennig, and Dorival (2019).

Adolescents are enthusiastic users of websites like Facebook, Ask.fm, and X, and they have become a driving force in the creation and design of new tools for interacting with their

friends because of the proliferation of mobile phones and social media. Nearly three-quarters (73%) of all American teenagers aged 13 to 17 own a smartphone, and over 90% of them own a cell phone. Researchers have observed changes in social media use in recent years as teens look for "parent free" spaces; Facebook is no longer as popular with this younger generation, but Snapchat, X, and Instagram are growing rapidly (Carvalho, 2020).

Social dynamics are important in understanding bullying and cyberbullying behaviours, because understanding bullying behaviours requires a grasp of social dynamics, according to Jankowiak (2024). Bullying and cyberbullying are challenging issues to address because they have serious psychological effects on the perpetrators, bystander and victims. According to studies by (Modecki et al., 2014), as cited by Jankowiak (2024), bullying is prevalent among adolescents. Both traditional and cyberbullying have a significant detrimental impact on the psychological health of both victims and perpetrators. Bullying experiences are strongly associated with the emergence of emotional, cognitive, social, and behavioural issues (Loch et al., 2020). Bullies frequently use their violent behaviours which are more instrumental than emotional, to elevate their standing among their peers. A study by (Nocentini et al., 2019; Broll and Reynolds, 2021). Childhood experiences of violence, particularly in a violent family setting when parents engage in domestic violence, are a reliable high-risk predictor of bullying. The perpetration of cyberbullying is similarly linked to negligent parenting, claim (Broll and Reynolds, 2021).

According to (Ganotz et al., 2021), bullying and cyberbullying present significant risks to the mental and developmental well-being of both victims and offenders; therefore, it is necessary to prevent these behaviours by encouraging favourable developmental circumstances. Childhood victimization is a significant risk factor for perpetrating bullying and/or cyberbullying. Teenagers who have been victims of violence and are currently or have previously been in romantic or dating relationships are likewise more likely to bully or cyberbully their peers (Jankowiak, 2024). Jankowiak further states that bullying and cyberbullying are perpetrated by those who have experienced bullying and cyberbullying themselves.

1.3. Significance of the study.

The study's significance is to investigate adolescent girls' understanding of cyberbullying in a school environment, it also aims to return to the fundamentals and examine a detailed

definition of cyberbullying, as well as the reasons why the phenomenon continues to grow despite the abundance of existing literature and the experiences of those who commit cyberbullying. Since it is a case study, it will help shed light on current cyberbullying concerns, enhance comprehension of what is known about the phenomena in a world that is changing all the time, and add to the body of material already available on cyberbullying. Activities aimed at teenage girls who are at danger of social alienation will receive particular attention from the project. The project will recommend training for current and prospective professionals who work with young adolescents in the fields of youth work, health care, culture, and society. Its educational focus will be on multi-professional working methods, art-based methodologies, and the knowledge and skills required when dealing with and assisting young adolescents. Hence the researcher is interested on zooming in on the girl child or female students for the purposes of this study. There is little discussion of cyberbullying of female students, very few scholarly studies are dedicated to cyberbullying among female students in South Africa (Chukwuere, 2017), particularly in Durban. While Aune (2009) believed that female (38%) students are bullied more than male (26%) counterparts, and there are predestined articles differentiating male and female experiences of cyberbullying (Chukwuere, 2017).

Research problem.

Despite extensive research on bullying and cyberbullying the issue continues to grow at an alarming rate and increasingly viewed as a global concern, and on the verge of becoming a pandemic. This rise highlights the need to reflect on existing approaches and address the gaps in the literature regarding this subject. Pertinent questions about where we are going wrong need be addressed. "The literature on cyberbullying is still comparatively rare and characterized by a lack of conceptual clarity." (Englander et al., 2017) referenced (Vanderbosch and Cleemput, 2008) he continues saying that although scholars have given cyberbullying a lot of attention, but there is still debate over what constitutes cyberbullying. Only a small number of studies address situations, such as the gendered roles of bullying and how this topic affects different genders, while others concentrate more on bullying and cyberbullying in general.

Girls and boys experience the effects of bullying in different ways; Bullying victimization is experienced extensively in international and South African schools and results in numerous serious consequences for the victim, traumatic stress being one of these, which has received

limited attention in South African literature (Meyer, 2019). In a study conducted by (Estevez, Misitu, & Herrero, 2005; & Holand, 2003), as cited by (Brochado, 2017). Most studies focused on cyberbullying victims only, as in other types of violence for example, Gender-Based violence, researchers are always prone to address bullying through the victim's perspective, probably because there is a higher tendency to look at the enormity of the problem considering those who were injured rather than those who attacked.

The researcher has taken a keen interest in exploring this phenomenon through the perpetrator's experiences because the research about understanding a perpetrators world is very little almost none, not many have taken the time to find out what happens in the mind of a perpetrator, what is the driving force behind the act, maybe involving perpetrators will help us answer some of the pertinent questions about the continuation of the topic at hand.

1.4. Objectives.

- To investigate adolescent girls' understanding of cyberbullying in the school environment.
- To explore the social and psychological impact of cyberbullying among adolescent girls.
- To examine the predominant factors influencing cyberbullying.
- To assess or explore the perpetrator's awareness of their bullying behaviours.

1.5. Research Questions.

- What do adolescents think cyberbullying is?
- What are the social and psychological effects of cyberbullying?
- What are underlying factors that influence cyberbullying among adolescents?
- Do adolescent girls who engage in cyberbullying realize the impact of their actions on others?

1.6. Contextual dynamics.

This study took place in a former all-white high school for girls which was established (in 1965). But the school later started its intake of black students from different neighboring townships, the school is now dominated by black learners. The school is situated next to the mall, surrounded by beautiful houses, some of which are still in their original state (with red brick walls), and some have been modified to recent trends. There is a lot of development in the area surrounding the school even though the school is multicultural, it has a strong grounding in the Christian religion as all assemblies and events are Christian based. The school has always been a single-sex school for girls. There are two neighboring high schools which cater for boys and girls.

1.7. The research site.

The High School in question was established in 1965, it is situated in an affluent middle-class suburb area called Montclair in Durban. This school currently has an enrolment of eight-hundred and twenty-six learners and has forty-two teachers. The school has 80% black learners, 10% Indian learners, 5% White learners and 5% Coloured learners. There is one white teacher (female), 15 Indian teachers (13 females and two males) and 26 black teachers (21 females and 5 males). The school is divided into juniors and seniors. Juniors are made up of grades eight and nine and the senior school is made up of grades ten to twelve. Teachers address learners as ‘Ladies’ and they are also encouraged to address each other as ‘Ladies’. Respect for self and others, humility, integrity, peace, unity, sisterhood and love are values that are promoted by the school.

1.8. Structure of the Dissertation.

Chapter 1: This chapter introduces, outlines, and contextualizes the research question/study. It will set out the objectives and research questions. The chapters state that the focus of the study is based on the social and psychological effects of cyberbullying among adolescent girls.

Chapter 2: This chapter will unpack cyberbullying and its effects within the school context, while focusing on existing South African and international existing literature on cyberbullying among adolescents.

Chapter 3: This chapter explores the theoretical framework for the study. Titled; Investigating the Social and Psychological Effects of Cyberbullying among Adolescents, it also discusses why the chosen theory fits the study. The framework will build a foundation for the methodology section.

Chapter 4: This chapter details the practical aspect of the research. It presents the methodology on which how will the study proceed in answering the research question. It will outline the chosen methodology, sample procedure, data collection, data analysis and ethical dilemmas encountered during data collection.

Chapter 5: This chapter present data findings and, then discuss them through recurrent themes that are very central to the data findings. Finally, it will analyse the data findings and present the conclusion.

Chapter 6: Conclusion and recommendations of the research.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW.

2.1. Introduction.

The literature review explored case studies involving adolescent girls, with the goal of investigating the social and psychological effects of cyberbullying among adolescents in a school setting, within Durban, KwaZulu-Natal. Both local and international studies will be highlighted to identify trends in cyberbullying. The initial section of the literature review will examine the concept of cyberbullying by referencing the current local studies. This is crucial for understanding the prevalence of cyberbullying within the South African context, which will serve as the foundation for the study. The subsequent section will concentrate on cyberbullying within school settings, highlighting the social and psychological dimensions relevant to both local and international research. Finally, it will wrap up by evaluating the literature and discussing how the examined work has shaped the selected research methodology and the insights it will provide.

2.2. Definition of cyberbullying.

The Council of Europe describes cyber violence as the utilization of computer systems to inflict, enable, or menace individuals with violence, leading to, or potentially leading to, physical, sexual, psychological, or economic damage or distress, and may involve taking advantage of the person's conditions, traits, or weaknesses (Council of Europe, 2020).

2.3. Cyberbullying.

Cyberbullying can be defined as intentional, repetitive, and harmful behaviours carried out using computers, cell phones, and other electronic devices. In recent years, there has been an increase in the rates of cyberbullying parallel to the rise of internet usage (Akdeniz, 2024). Bullying and cyberbullying threatens the development and mental health of both victims and perpetrators (Jankowiak, 2024). Cyberbullying has been acknowledged as a significant public health issue, with detrimental effects on victims (Olweus et al., 2019:70). He further states that it has emerged as a global public health challenge, posing a worldwide social problem.

Research has established links between cyberbullying and issues relating to mental health, antisocial behaviour, and suicidal tendencies among children and teenagers (Zhang, 2022). In the past, bullying typically referred to youth violence occurring in school settings, impacting

children and adolescents. However, advancements in technology have made online aggression easier, giving rise to the term “cyberbullying.” Since the advent of the internet, the traditional definition of bullying has evolved; electronic communication has led to the emergence of cyberbullying, which does not require face-to-face interactions typical of conventional bullying (Reddy, 2023), because it is frequently carried out over the Internet, personal websites, e-mails, blogs, instant messaging, chat rooms, and more, (Tozun, 2018) agrees that cyberbullying involves obnoxious words and social attacks by anonymous messages.

Risk and protective variables associated to cyberbullying behaviours may alter because of the quick changes in the digital world, or they may become more prevalent. For instance, the incidence of social media use has significantly expanded over the past ten years due to technology advancements and new risks. Due to the widespread use of social media, there is a greater chance of cyberbullying and cyber victimization (Giumetti and Kowalski, 2022). The expansion of the Internet and the advancement of communication technologies have many positive effects on society. But it has also become a site for a rise in online crimes, such as cyberbullying. Cyberbullying is a phenomenon in which an offender intentionally and persistently acts aggressively against others to do them harm via chat rooms, instant messaging, Facebook, X, and other social media platforms. In the literature, cyberbullying is defined in several ways. Raskaus and Stoltz, for instance, define cyberbullying as bullying in which an individual uses electronic media to harass, threaten, attack, or stalk another individual. posing as or terrifying their coworkers (Saleem, 2022).

According to a study by Lee, Hong, Yoon, Peguero, and Seok (2018), these writers seem to agree that cyberbullying is a severe problem that harms teenagers. Additionally, (Chun, 2020) agrees with the authors above regarding the grave harm that cyberbullying does to adolescents. Because of advancements in technology, traditional school bullying problems have started to extend beyond the school environment. And all age groups are using technology and the Internet more frequently, but teenagers are the ones who use it the most (Kowalski et al., 2019). (Patchin and Hinduja, 2010) conducted a study that was cited by Jankowiak (2024). Since there is a digital footprint involved and the digital footprint left by cyberbullying is harmful and can have long-lasting effects, as the content may remain online for the victim's entire life, affecting their future social and professional life and the victim

may feel as though they are unable to leave, which can exacerbate feelings of helplessness and hopelessness.

In recent assessment of regional and community-level research, (Zhu et al., 2021), found that cybervictimization was common in Canada (13.99%) and Spain (57.51%), with the latter country having the highest prevalence of this kind of bullying. According to the same analysis, the prevalence of cyber-perpetration ranged from 6% in China to 46.3% in South Korea. Data from 25 different countries were included in seven research. Cyber-perpetration rates ranged from 3.0 to 30.6%, bersanding rates ranged from 13.0 to 53.1%, and cyber victimization rates ranged from 2.8 to 31.5%. There are 4% of persons that are victims of cybercrime. The prevalence of cyber-perpetration and cyber-victimization was 11.91% and 9.62%, respectively, based on the meta-analysis (Henares-Montiel, 2022).

In 2020, Rodríguez-Hidalgo conducted a research study. Through the completion of a series of self-reports, a comprehensive sample of adolescents from Secondary Education ($N = 24943$; mean age = 13.92; $SD = 1.30$, girls = 49.9%) from Ecuador = 10,737 and Spain = 14,206 took part. Weighted analyses and structural equation models were used. The results indicated that 8.8% of cyber-victims, 3.1% of cyber-aggressors, and 4.9% of cyber-victims-aggressors were discovered in Spain; meanwhile, 8.7% of cyber-victims, 5.1% of cyber-aggressors, and 14.3% of cyber-victims-aggressors were in Ecuador. Although the importance of skills differed by country, self-deprecation and social skills were predictive of cyber victimization in both.

Bullying is very common in Africa, and research has shown that cyberbullying is common in South African schools (Kırlı, 2020), he further examined the relationship between social media use and cyberbullying in a qualitative study and found that social media use was linked to either cyberbullying or cybervictimization. Additionally, (Çimke and Cerit, 2021), also discovered similar results in terms a positive correlation between cyberbullying victimisation and perpetration and social media addiction. All things considered, research indicates that personality traits, cyberbullying, and poor social media use are related (Iqbal, 2022), asserts that communication and the use of information technology have become ubiquitous in the modern era. In a recent regional research, nine out of ten (92.9%) people aged 12 to 24 either own or have access to a mobile phone, which they use for personal purposes. 81% of students between the ages of 13 and 17 who participated in a study of students in Cape Town, Durban,

and Johannesburg said they had access to a computer at home, and 62% said they could use their computers to access the internet. South Africa has the highest rate of cyberbullying worldwide, with 51% of South African teenagers reporting having been the victim of cyberbullying, according to a 2018 Ipsos survey conducted in KwaZulu Natal. This is much greater than the 37% global average “Network 24”. These are findings from local studies.

In the SEM study by Zaborskis, Tesler, Heinz, and Illionsky, (2018). According to recent surveys, 15.6% of students reported having experienced bullying at school, while 6.5% claimed having experienced cyberbullying. Of the participants, 38.6% said their depression was so bad that it interfered with their ability to go about their everyday lives, 17.8% considered suicide, 12.0% made plans to take their own life, and 9.5% honestly did. Suicide thoughts, plans, and attempts were much higher among victims of bullying in schools and online. Teenage suicidality is significantly impacted by bullying overall. In addition to individual variables like gender, personality traits, age, and problem-solving abilities, a study by (Kowalski et al., 2019), found that cyberbullying is linked to other risk factors. variables pertaining to the length of time spent online. The relationship between society and schools can either be protective or dangerous in terms of cyberbullying and cybervictimization. Cyberbullying lurks behind screens like an unseen tormentor. According to a 2021 poll of parents in South Africa, almost 50% of their kids engage in cyberbullying. "Tackling the menace of cyberbullying," according to “News 24”.

Compared to persistent harassment, cyberbullying that occurs infrequently has a significantly lower potential to result in long-term issues. Studies have examined the association between victimization and a discernible decline in academic achievement and family harmony. The emergence of affective disorders and psychosocial issues has been examined in other researchers, as stated by (Mwansa, 2023). He further notes that school-related problems linked to the distraction of cyberbullying are consistently reported by victims of cyberbullying. Pupils see a sharp decline in their grades and a rise in absences from class, and that the negative effects of being a victim of cyberbullying can range from little irritation and distress to psychological issues and other issues in one's life. Depending on the frequency, duration, and severity of the harmful act, cyberbullying can lead to several unfavourable effects.

Cyberbullying and inappropriate social media use have been linked in recent studies (Kircaburun et al., 2019). Additionally, (Kircaburun et al., 2020), found that those who engage in cyberbullying score lower on self-esteem and higher on problematic social media use, dissociative experiences, Cluster B personality traits (narcissistic, histrionic, anti-social, and borderline), depression, and childhood emotional trauma. Adolescents who have experienced victimisation may exhibit impulsive, angry, and aggressive behaviours in response to perceived provocation (Sullivan et al., 2021). Teenagers who are frequently irritated may grow irritated and act aggressively (Paquin et al., 2017). Many authors seem to agree that cyberbullying is linked to inappropriate social media use, they went on to exploring the effects, but few scholars are exploring the fact that perpetrators may use social media to bully others because they want to feel superior.

A comprehensive review found that gender differences investigating gender differences in youth cyberbullying victimization experiences yielded conflicting findings. While some studies suggested that female students were more likely to become victims of cyberbullying (Roch et al., 2017), other studies suggested that male students were more likely to become victims of cyberbullying (Schultze-Krumbholz et al., 2018). In contrast, (Network, 2023) data indicates that cyberbullying is a significant issue in South Africa. One study found that girls in South Africa are slightly more likely than boys to encounter cyberbullying in the classroom (33.1%) and at home (43.4%). They also point out that cyberbullying is a severe problem that South African people and communities need to confront because it has occasionally even led to suicide. There is a little bit of divergence between researchers as (Schultze-Krumbholz et al., 2018). Seem to think that boys are more likely to become victims of cyberbullying, while (Network, 2023) girls are slightly more likely than boys, and there is a bit of divergence between researchers when it comes to gender. Gender is one of variable that is understudied when it comes to the topic of cyberbullying.

As a feature of any social media platform, online affordability easy access to the Internet, availability of the Internet, and anonymity that the Internet offers is repeatedly emphasised in the extant literature on online bullying. This is because it creates a multitude of opportunities for teenagers and young adults to engage in online transgressions (Goldsmith and Wall, 2022), such as cyberbullying and cyber-hate (Wachs et al., 2019; Wachs and Wright, 2018). Lindy criticises technology for providing access that enables bullies to victimise others, citing affordability and anonymity as essential components of the definition of cyberbullying. Some

scholars focus more on the features of affordability of being online and easy excess to internet, while ignoring for example cultural backgrounds as well as upbringing because your cultural background and how you grew up has a way of shaping who you are.

Cyberbullying is more common among participants who utilized the Internet for social networking, online gaming, and video consumption, according to a Turkish study by (Taylan et al., 2017), that involved middle school pupils. In a study including 6,237 teenagers and young people between the ages of 15 and 22, (Zsila et al., 2018) found that problematic internet use and social media use were significant predictors of cyberbullying and cybervictimization. The findings of (Taylan et al., 2017), in a Turkish study that was conducted, and the study that was conducted by (Dowell et al., 2009). there seems to be a concurrence in terms of females using the internet for socialising and man using internet for gaming.

There are three types of cyberbullying roles: victims, bully-victims, and pure bullies. While bully victims are reactive learners who bully when they are bullied, pure bullies are aggressive and rarely become victims of bullying. Victims are students who find it difficult to protect themselves from bullies (Radebe, 2021). He went on saying that, instead then employing general strategies that lack specific cyberbullying components, it is crucial to identify each learner's role in cyberbullying with the aim of guiding targeted interventions. The internet aspect of cyberbullying acts appears to allow individuals to view and distribute the bullying content in an endless fashion, thus the perpetrator of cyberbullying does not need to repeat the act (Tanrikulu, 2021), and social repercussions of cyber victimization include social rejection, loneliness, and distancing from peers (Tanrikulu, 2019).

According to a study by (Giuletti and Kowalski, 2022), the quick changes in the digital world also result in a change in the risk and protective factors associated with cyberbullying behaviours. New risk factors may appear because of technological advancements, or the influence of preexisting risks may intensify. For instance, over the past ten years, social media use has become much more common. Because social media is so widely used, there is a greater chance of cyberbullying and cybervictimization. As stated by (Kim et al., 2017). Our everyday lives now involve the internet more and more. Because internet environments make learning, entertainment, socialisation, and communication easier, people regularly use them. All age groups are using technology and the internet more frequently, but teenagers are

the ones who use it the most (Kowalski et al., 2019). The Internet, smartphones, social media, and several more platforms are just a few examples of how technology developments have altered people's lives.

Cyberbullying is still a significant issue in South Africa, according to statistics collected over time. One study found that South African women are somewhat more likely than boys to encounter cyberbullying at home (43.4%) and at school (33.1%) (42.4% at home and 29.3% at school). Cyberbullying is a serious problem that South Africans as individuals and communities must be worried about since, as Network (2023) notes, it has occasionally even led to death. Control and surveillance are two aspects of online interactions that promote and facilitate frightening tactics (Stephenson et al., 2018). Violence can therefore occur at any moment, and since the aggressor cannot see the victim's reaction when acting online, physical proximity to the victim doesn't matter as much, which makes it simple for them to minimize the seriousness of their acts (Fernández and Jiménez, 2020). Lastly, the attacker may feel safe due to the anonymity provided by the internet, while the victim endures greater humiliation due to a growing potential audience (Stonard, 2020).

When everyone has access to digital communication, everywhere, with everyone, the likelihood of experiencing cyber-interpersonal violence increases. Adolescents' social processes benefit greatly from the use of digital tools, but digital practices also expose young people to interpersonal intrusion, increasing their vulnerability to cyberbullying, cyber stalking, cyber dating abuse, and sexting (Caridade et al., 2019; Jun, 2020). Recent research indicates that certain types of violence have intimidating strategies like control and monitoring are encouraged by the special characteristics of online interactions (Stephenson et al., 2018). As a result, physical closeness to the victim becomes less significant in an online setting, and aggression can happen at any time. Furthermore, the perpetrator is tempted to downplay the severity of their actions since they are blind to the victim's response (Muñoz-Fernández and SánchezJiménez, 2020). Finally, the victim suffers additional humiliation because of the increasing possible audience, while the aggressor may feel protected by the anonymity offered by the online environment (Stonard, 2020), and (Machado, 2022) agree with the above author. Cyber violence is becoming a serious issue in most regions of the world, impacting more and more people, especially women and young people (Council of Europe, 2020). Additionally, they claimed that cyberviolence is a common occurrence that frequently resembles real violence.

The characteristics of cyberbullying are the focus of the present literature (Buelga et al., 2020; Caridade and Braga 2019; Galende et al., 2020). Due of their vulnerability or the fact that 56% of teenagers in dating relationships have experienced these problems, these are especially troubling difficulties for teenagers (Cava at al., 2020). However, prevalence rates differ according to victimization or perpetration patterns. 10.6% of teenagers who participated in cyber control behaviours acknowledged directly abusing their relationships online. When it came to direct cyber assault against their partner, this percentage rose to 82% (Borrajao et al., 2015). The prevalence of victimization rates exhibits similar trends based on regardless of whether there is direct cyber violence. (14%) or cyber control (75%) was measured. Hatred and harassment are examples of transgressions related to cyberbullying (Abarna et al., 2022; Kilvington, 2021).

According to a survey on the topic of cyberbullying conducted by (Jun, 2020), 34% of teenagers participated in cyberbullying as victims (14.6%), cyberbullies (6.3%), or both (13.1%). These are serious problems that need to be addressed, especially in adolescence, even though data on cyber violence varies. An extensive scoping review of the developing issue is presented in this paper. Society gained from the expansion of the Internet and the advancement of communication technologies in many ways. He further states that, it has also become a site for the increase in online crimes, such as cyberbullying. "Cyberbullying" is a phenomenon that happens when someone purposefully and repeatedly uses the Internet to act aggressively toward others. Numerous studies have been carried out to assess the incidence of cyberbullying among young people based on factors such as age, gender, socioeconomic level, and the digital divide. The studies' conclusions showed that cyberbullying is common and on the rise.

The prevalence of cyberbullying is positively impacted by socioeconomic class and digital divide factors, although the findings for age and gender are not entirely consistent (Saleem, 2022). He adds that low confidence and self-esteem are also reported to be present in all sufferers, along with depression. The literature has also looked at the emotional effects of both traditional and cyberbullying. Anger, stress, shame, excessive worrying, anxiety, loneliness, and defenselessness are just a few of the negative emotions that the victims describe experiencing. These psychological effects are also to blame for students' uncomfortable behavior, bad grades, poor academic performance, and absences from class.

More alarming is the relationship between Cyberbullying and suicidal ideation and self-harm that has also been reported in the literature.

The effects and components of cyberbullying have already been studied by several scholars (Peter and Petermann, 2018; Hinduja and Patchin, 2021). Other researchers have also investigated how to put anti-cyberbullying initiatives into action (Broll and Howells, 2021; Pennell et al., 2021). To better understand cyberbullying, several scholars have recently urged for more qualitative study, however these studies mostly use questionnaires and various quantitative data analysis techniques (Abela and Donlevy, 2020; Smith, 2019). These authors (Smith, 2019; Abela and Donlevy, 2020), continued saying that, while combating online misconduct is vital, improving current policies also requires an awareness of human behaviour and the underlying causes of online misconduct, such as cyberbullying, cyberthreat, and harassment. The backgrounds of persons who regularly engage in cyberbullying as well as social, cultural, and political situations may be linked to the underlying causes. These above authors agree that there is a need for more qualitative studies to better understand this phenomenon.

Adolescent who utilise a well-known social media site in the US have been known to commit suicide (Pierson, 2022). These suicidal ideation statistics are certainly troubling. However, since social learning theory states that people learn by observing, internalising, and then modelling behaviour, my research contributes to the extensive body of literature on cyberbullying by analysing the phenomenon through the lens of Bandura's conceptual framework and social learning theory on the theatrical model of everyday life, where participants' lived experiences shape one's behaviour in virtual reality as a response to social harms caused by cyberbullying.

Teenagers' health and wellbeing are at risk from cyberbullying, a form of bullying that takes place online (Sanchez, 2023) defines it as any behaviour done with a gadget, like a laptop, tablet, or smartphone. An individual or group uses chat rooms, email, text, or publishing on a website to do this. It is commonly known that cyberbullying has a detrimental impact on the victims and is a public health concern. To date, studies have shown a connection between cyberbullying and antisocial behaviour, mental health problems, and suicidal thoughts and behaviours in children and adolescents (Zhang, 2022). Bullying used to mostly involve adolescent antagonism aimed at children and teenagers in school environments. However, the

development of technology made it simpler to participate in online aggression, which is today referred to as "cyberbullying." Since the invention of the Internet, the idea of bullying has evolved (Reddy, 2023) asserts that cyberbullying, which was made feasible by electronic communications, differs from traditional bullying in that it does not involve in-person contacts.

According to several recent South African studies, the country ranks among the top five in the world for cyberbullying. Additionally, they clarify that the behaviour peaks between the ages of 13 and 15. Insecurity, fear, anxiety, and personal exposure to violent conduct that lowers self-esteem are the main causes of the cyberbullying epidemic. Cyberbullying lurks behind screens like an unseen tormentor. According to a 2021 poll of parents in South Africa, almost 50% of their kids engage in cyberbullying. According to News 24, addressing the scourge of cyberbullying.

A research study conducted by (Deschamps and McNutt, 2016), indicated that victims of cyberbullying may suffer from serious consequences, such as sadness, anxiety, fear, and low self-esteem. For example, teenagers who experience cyberbullying may feel overburdened, exposed, humiliated, helpless, resentful, alone, and lose interest in their school and lives. In severe situations, cyberbullying can even lead to suicide thoughts, social isolation, and mental health problems. Although software tools are used for threat detection, prevention, and response in the digital realm, there aren't any notable technology-based defences systems that address the risks associated with cyberbullying. Mwansa (2023), agrees that lack of cybersecurity defences and low cybersecurity awareness can expose students to cyberbullying, which can have negative consequences like psychological and emotional abuse that could ultimately lead to high dropout rates, as stated by Mwansa (2023). He continued saying that to prevent embarrassment, victims of cyberbullying typically choose not to disclose incidents.

According to research, teens' emotional and behavioural issues are predicted by cyberbullying and cyber-victimization (Kim et al., 2018). Cyber-victimization has been linked to poor mental health and a higher risk of suicide, and poor mental health. According to Tian et al., (2018). Additionally, the use of psychoactive substances (such as alcohol, marijuana, and other drugs) is more common among victims of cyberbullying. (Kim et al., 2020). Cyber-victims communicate more avoidantly, which helps to extend the duration of

the cybervictimization. It is challenging for parents to identify their children's cyberbullying because of the unfavourable or strained interactions between them and teenagers. According to several studies, up to 50% of victims either never tell anyone about the bullying they are going through or very infrequently do so out of fear of being cyberbullied again (Baron, 2018).

For teenagers who feel less powerful, the Internet may be important because power disparities are less noticeable there, which offers additional benefits like privacy or the technical know-how to respond to negative interpersonal situations in the real world. One illustration of this is the discovery that teenagers who engage in bullying more frequently are more likely to become victims of cyberbullying in the future (Chu et al., 2018). However, (Villora et al., 2021) appears to have a different opinion than that of (Chu et al., 2018), by stating that cyber aggression can be used to reflect a power imbalance between the target or targets and the perpetrator. There is a bit of inconsistency between these two author's findings.

Numerous documented instances of suicides connected to cyberbullying have brought attention to this topic. Cyberbullying has its own distinct features that may exacerbate its detrimental effects on victims, even if it shares some traits with traditional bullying. First and foremost, cyberbullying can happen anywhere and at any time. For instance, in a setting where images serve as a medium for experiencing one's identity and values, behaviors that involve sharing pictures and films are seen as more damaging than verbal or physical abuse. (Moretti, 2021), he continued saying that victims feel powerless in the face of the aggression, because they cannot control the bystanders' participation, eliminate the audiovisual material to stop its spread or escape the situation.

Since cyberbullies can remain anonymous, they are able to assume new identities or pose as friends of the victim. Because of their anonymity, cyberbullies are less afraid of consequences or punishment, which motivates them to continue acting in ways they wouldn't in person. Additionally, unlike conventional bullying, which makes bullies aware of the suffering they are bringing to the victim and may deter them from abusing others, cyberbullies are blind to the reactions of their victims. The bully's easy access to a wide audience is the third characteristic that sets cyberbullying apart (Camacho, 2018), as per research by (Anderson and Jiang, 2018). 95% of American kids between the ages of 13 and

17 (94% White and Black; 95% Hispanic) report having access to a smart phone. These two authors continued saying that, these teens use social media extensively: 85% of American teenagers between the ages of 13 and 17 report accessing YouTube, 72% Instagram, 69% Snapchat, 51% Facebook, and 32% X, engaging with one another on these social media sites, which are also the sites where cyberbullying occurs.

However, Meta which is a company that owns Facebook, Instagram and WhatsApp has the following safety measures in place which can protect teens, measures like; Report, block, delete and unfriend who so ever posting negative comments provided that they are educated about them, and these are the areas in which they lack, Meta must have a translator that understands all languages that will be able to detect if the post or a comment is negative or harmful, then the meta must flag such posts and suspend the channel. They must also comply with registrations such as POPIA Act, then if the content goes against it, it must be burned.

However, parents should also play an important role in making sure that teenagers use their phones responsibly, since they are responsible for buying smartphones for their children, since the ownership of smartphones among teenagers has increased access of online communication, and that has increased the risk of cyberbullying among adolescents According to (StopBullying. Gov, 2021) and parents should be actively monitoring how children use their devices and with whom, for example parents can make use of apps such as Family links, because it helps parents monitor their children are doing online and also how much time they spend online, parents should also make the rules clear regarding the use of smartphones, also by educating adolescents about internet safety tips as well as acceptable online behaviours and also by encouraging them to speak up if they suspect that something is not right, someone is bullying them.

2.4. Cyberbullying in a school.

A School can be defined as a community, as the unit of change and where social and emotional learning happens through daily interactions and practices at multiple setting levels in the school using collaborative efforts that include all support staff, children, parents, and teachers (Yang et al., 2018). Limo (2015) & (Yang et al., 2018), agree that students from all backgrounds come together in an educational institution to receive an education. In addition to interacting with one another in class, kids are frequently left alone without their teachers outside of the classroom. Children and young people who attend school go through a variety

of experiences, some of which are better or worse. He goes on to say that bullying in schools is defined as when pupils are victimized and intimidated by their peers in a classroom setting. Bullying is the commonest form of school-based violence in South Africa as all schools have recorded some incidences of this phenomenon (Chitsamatanga and Rembe, 2020:68). School shootings, persistent bullying, physical violence, and suicide all clearly show a connection between bullying and school-based violence (Olweus et al., 2019:70). The atmosphere of violence existing in South African schools reflects the violence that permeates the society at large. Students in South African school's face bullying in a variety of ways, including cyberbullying, emotional, psychological, and physical bullying (Reyneke and Jacobs, 2018:68). Physical bullying happens when a student uses overt physical behaviours to exert control and authority over their peers (Schmidt, Pierce, and Stoddard, 2016:233). Kicking, punching, beating, and other physical assaults are examples of such behaviours (Reyneke and Jacobs, 2018:67). Some researchers added by saying that, as evidenced by school shootings, persistent bullying, physical violence, and suicide, bullying has become more prevalent in South African schools and is strongly associated with school violence e.g., (Juan, Zuze, Hannan, Govender and Reddy, 2018:1).

Peers and adults at school can be the school-related resources of learning cyberbullying perpetration. Schools are one of the main places where school children socialize. During the socialization process, children get engaged in several relationships with peers. While some relationships can positively lead school children, other relationships can do the opposite. Cyberbullying can be regarded as relationship which leads and impacts school children in a negative way. Although cyberbullying behaviours can occur outside the school as well, learning how to cyberbully others cannot be isolated from the social environment of the peers at school (Tanrikulu, 2019). He further state that information communication technology provides them a sense of anonymity. Anonymity thus, can be considered as a significant resource regarding learning cyberbullying perpetration.

People use a range of social media sites, and according to reports, the average social media user has roughly nine accounts globally (Dean, 2020). Additionally, people from a variety of demographic categories use social media platforms (Pew Research Centre, 2018). These websites foster creativity, social awareness, and learning while enabling people to interact and build online communities. Nonetheless, there is proof that social media use may negatively affect certain users' everyday lives and health (Jenkins et al., 2020; Masood et al.,

2020). Adolescents who engage in cyberbullying exhibit higher levels of psychopathology and suicidality. Compared to their peers who do not engage in cyberbullying, victims and perpetrators of cyberbullying are more likely to experience suicidality, but to a lower degree. Notably, some data indicates that young people who engage in and are victims of cyberbullying are particularly vulnerable (Arnon-Shay, 2022).

According to research, bullying is most prevalent in middle school, but it also peaks as students are ready to attend high school, such as between elementary and middle school and middle school and high school. Race and ethnicity Participation in bullying is a cross-cultural and cross-ethnic phenomenon. For instance, studies have indicated that school children from ethnic minorities are more likely to experience harassment than pupils from ethnic majorities (Shaaban, 2022). Numerous studies have shown that victims of bullying and cyberbullying experience emotional distress, anxiety, and depression symptoms, along with psychological conditions like social isolation and loneliness, which are linked to higher absenteeism from school and lower academic performance (Tozun, 2018). Bullying has been linked to scholastic difficulties for school children, according to numerous research studies by (Davis et al., 2018; Latin Vailancourt, 2022), so these schoolers agree with (Tozun, 2018), of bullying being linked to scholastic difficulties, such as anxiety, despair and so forth. In research including 12–17-year-olds from 65 countries, conducted by (Man, Liu, and Xue, 2022), discovered that bullying was most common in African nations (Graham, 2023).

More than half of the students in a rural high school in Limpopo were cyberbullied, with sexual offenses being the most common type, according to a South African study by (Farhangpour, Maluleke, and Mutshaeni, 2019). These researchers discovered that these occurrences had a detrimental emotional and intellectual impact on students. Because victims of bullying may lose attention, become disengaged from their academic obligations, and experience depression, poor academic accomplishment is a potential consequence of bullying. The most common kind of teenage violence that has grown to be a major worry for students and a worldwide public health concern is school bullying. "A type of aggressive behaviour in which someone else intentionally and repeatedly causes injury or discomfort" is the definition of bullying. Bully's strength is determined by their age, socioeconomic status, social and technical skills, and physical prowess. Bullying in schools differs from other types of violence and from normal conflict between peers or individuals of the same age (Shaaban, 2022). He continued saying that, bullying in schools differs from other types of violence and

from straightforward student-to-student dispute in three ways. As an illustration, consider the following: the intent to cause harm, the repetition of destructive behaviours, and the disparity in power between the bully (the one who engages in bullying) and the victim. The bully has advantages over the victim, including popularity, authority, social standing, and physical size and strength. Young adolescents may not yet be proficient in efficient emotional and behavioural management, which could increase their vulnerability to self-harm and cyberbullying.

Adolescence is a critical time for identity development and social engagement abilities. The prevalence of involvement in cyberbullying varies significantly by nation, gender, and study type. According to the nationally representative cross-national Health Behaviour in School-Aged Children research conducted in 2018, the prevalence of cyberbullying among 13-year-olds varied from 5.0% in the Netherlands to 24.3% in Lithuania (for boys) and 7.8% in the Netherlands to 27.8% in Latvia (for girls). In England, rates were 17.3% for boys and 26.6% for girls, according to the same survey. Compared to age-standardized rates in England, these numbers show a significant increase of 2.5% (boys) and 5.8% (girls) for 11 to 15-year-olds reported in 2014 (Gohal, 2018).

South African studies, examining the relationship between gender and cyberbullying among learners in Limpopo found no significant differences between cyberbullying behaviour and psychological and emotional distress (Paruk and Nassen, 2022). However, other South African studies have produced mixed findings regarding the psychological effects of cyberbullying. Some have identified a significant relationship between cyberbullying and the mental well-being of learners, as well as emotional distress (Mong, 2020). He continued saying that these studies found that cyberbullying resulted, among other indicators, in learners experiencing poor concentration, low academic achievement, absenteeism, anxiety, suicidal ideation, a sense of helplessness, and low self-esteem. Students who played the same roles bully or victim in both online and classroom settings were found to be similar, according to the analysis of variance. In addition to greater scores in perceived stress, loneliness, melancholy, and social anxiety, those who experienced traditional or cyberbullying, or both, concurrently showed lower scores in life satisfaction, emotional clarity, emotion regulation, and physical and social self-concept (Estevez, 2020). He continued saying that bullies who engage in traditional bullying, cyberbullying, or both at the same time showed lower scores in the areas of academic and family self-concept, life

satisfaction, emotional clarity, and emotion regulation, and higher scores in perceived stress, loneliness, depressive symptomatology, fear of negative assessment, avoidance, and general social anxiety (Estevez, 2020).

The prevalence of cyberbullying among secondary school students worldwide, and in South Africa specifically, is rising rapidly. Due to the prevalence of this disease in recent years, a significant number of youngsters have been victims of cyberbullying. Cyberbullying occurs when offenders quickly disseminate offensive content to a broad audience, usually through social media (Nyoni, 2021). Therefore, deliberate and persistent injury through the use of cyberspace might be characterized as cyberbullying (Siegel, 2012, p. 532). We emphasize that, just as in real life, a cyberbully is a malevolent aggressor who uses physical or psychological harm to target others to obtain implicit or explicit pleasure or financial gain (Moise, 2022). Parents should keep a close eye on how their children use their devices and with whom. For instance, they can use apps like Family Links to keep tabs on their children's online activities and time spent on them. Parents should also establish clear guidelines for smartphone use, teach teenagers safety precautions and appropriate online conduct, and encourage them to speak up if they believe someone is bullying them or something is wrong.

2.5. Motivation behind perpetrators of cyberbullying.

Social media sites allow individuals to connect and create an online community, as well as encouraging learning, social awareness, and creativity, and there is evidence to suggest that social media use can have a negative impact on some users' health and daily life according to (Balouch et al., 2019; Jenkins et al., 2020). Because cyberbullies can disparage others remotely thanks to the internet.

The majority of cyberbullies feel considerably better about themselves when they criticize and threaten other young people. There are instances in which cyberbullying can occur even when the relationship between the perpetrator and the victim ends against the victim's will, as the cyberbully may become fixated on the target he wishes to harass due to unrequited feelings for the victim (Moise, 2022). He goes on to argue that retaliation Sometimes the victim has experienced injustices, whether real or imagined, and the cyberbully wants to exact revenge. The cyberbully feels that he would only be considered avenged for this wrong if he causes the victim serious harm through online abuse. Retaliation may be the driving force for cyberbullies, who frequently feel wronged.

According to the same review, the prevalence of cybervictimization ranged from 13.99% to 57.51% in Canada and Spain, respectively, with Spain having the highest rates of this kind of bullying. In contrast, the prevalence of cyber-perpetration ranged from 6% to 46.3% in China and South Korea. (Montiel-Henares, 2022). Just 18% of men reported having experienced bullying, compared to over 24% of women. Similar trends were seen in rumours, where 15% of women and 9% of men said they had been the object of a rumour. Nonetheless, more men (5%) than women (3%) have reported threats of danger (National Centre for Educational Statistics, 2016). From elementary school through high school, the prevalence of bullying declines each grade level. Although data indicates that bullying is most prevalent in middle school, it peaks in schools as children get ready to attend high school (i.e., between elementary and mid-school and middle school and high school).

Race and ethnicity Participation in bullying is a cross-cultural and cross-ethnic phenomenon. For instance, studies have indicated that school children from ethnic minorities are more likely to experience harassment than pupils from ethnic majorities. Violence at private and public schools differed. For instance, 62% of children attending private schools reported having experienced physical violence, compared to 76% of children attending public schools. Just to determine the percentage of bullies among middle and high school pupils, Galal and his colleagues conducted another study in Egypt in 2019, that focused on rural schools and discovered that 9.5% of the kids polled by the researchers were bullies (Shaaban, 2022).

Previous studies have demonstrated the unmistakable role that family factors-particularly relational and contextual family factors, and to a lesser degree, individual parental factors-have in bullying. More precisely, the variables that are more reliable and stable as indicators of the phenomenon are, on the one hand, contextual family variables like parental mental health and domestic violence, and, on the other hand, relational family processes like child abuse, neglect, and maladaptive parenting. According to 35.9% of participants in a study by (Baldry et al., 2019) involving 4390 teenagers between the ages of 13 and 18, their parents did not keep an eye on them when they were online, and 43.6% said that their parents did not provide them any instruction on how to use the internet safely. Furthermore, the study found that teenagers who were both cyberbullied and cyber-victims had less parental supervision. Children's behaviour is greatly influenced by their parents (Elsaesser et al., 2017), adolescents who have loving and supporting parents are less likely to commit crimes. Positive

parent-child relationships can prevent children from engaging in harmful activities, even when parents are unable to actively manage their conduct (Hinduja and Patchin, 2013). (Elsaesser et al., 2017), conducted a systematic review up until October 2016 to examine the role parents play in preventing cyberbullying and cybervictimization in adolescence. The authors discovered that a lower engagement of children in cyberbullying, both as perpetrators and as victims, appears to be more closely associated with parental supervision, which is an essential component of a loving and supporting connection. Definitively, these studies demonstrated the decisive role that family variables play in the role.

According to (Lopez-Castro and Priegue, 2019). Numerous studies have demonstrated that schoolchildren who experience bullying suffer academically as a result. As stated by (Laith and Vaillancourt, 2022) and (Davis et al., 2018). In a study including 12–17-year-olds from 65 countries, (Man, Liu, and Xue, 2022) discovered that bullying was more common in African nations. (Graham, 2023). More than half of the students in a rural high school in Limpopo were cyberbullied, with sexual offenses being the most common sort, according to a South African study by (Farhangpour, Maluleke, and Mutshaeni, 2019). (Lopez-Castro and Priegue, 2019). Cited, (Kowalski et al., 2014) who conducted a thorough meta-analysis research study on cyberbullying among youth, which included a critical evaluation. According to their research, children who are the targets of cyberbullying had less emotional ties to their parents, more parental discipline, and less frequent parental supervision. However (Koyanagi, Carvalho, Smith, Haro and Vancampfort, 2019), seems to diverge by concluding that, statistically, relationships for bullying perpetrators were linked with wrong friends, negative attitude towards school; go to private schools and ethnicity, and their conclusion was backed by (Qwabe, 2023).

2.6. International Literature.

Marciano (2019) cited, (Garett, Lord, and Young, 2016). Researchers and the public are paying more and more attention to the perpetration and victimization of cyberbullying. According to (We Are Social, 2018), 3 billion people were active social media users in 2018, and approximately 4 billion people used Internet-enabled devices for an average of six hours every day. Since 95% of teenagers in the US have access to a smartphone, over 45% of those between the ages of 13 and 17 report that they are virtually always online, preferably on the most widely used social media platforms YouTube, Instagram, and Snapchat (Pew, 2018).

In a population-based study on the experiences of cyberbullying among teenagers between the ages of 13 and 16 (Baumann, 2023), for example found that while girls were less likely than boys to be cyberbully perpetrators (5.6% vs. 9.3%) or cyberbully victim/perpetrators (4.6% vs. 5.8%), they were more likely to be victims of cyberbullying (6% vs. 3.5%). Other studies, however, show less gender disparity, especially when it comes to cybervictimization. (Baumann, 2023) adds that the findings that girls may experience cyberbullying more frequently than boys may be because female youth use online social networks more frequently than male youth, which gives them more opportunities to engage in cyberbullying victimization and perpetration as well as more vulnerability to the negative effects of being a victim of cyberbullying.

(Brochado, Soares, and Fraga, 2017), conducted a scoping review and found 159 studies that documented the incidence of cybervictimization and cyber-perpetration among young people. Middle school student samples that were primarily from North America and Europe had prevalence rates that varied from 5% in Australia, Sweden, and Germany to 23% in Canada and China (Marciano, 2019) cited. Globally, population-based research show prevalences ranging from 3 to 50% for cyberbullying perpetration and 10 to 40% for cyberbullying victimization. It's interesting to note that traditional bullying experiences and cyberbullying are closely related; for example, nine out of ten teenagers who report experiencing cybervictimization also report experiencing traditional forms of bullying (Bernhard, 2021).

After looking at 2,186 self-reported data from middle and high school students in Canada, (Mishna et al., 2019), discovered that more than half of the students said they were either the victims or the perpetrators of cyberbullying. Adolescent victims of cyberbullying remain a concern for numerous nations and international organizations. One-third of more than 170,000 teenagers and young people in 30 countries were found to be victims of cyberbullying in a recent report by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). (Peprah, 2023). Peprah continued saying that numerous research has shown a high correlation between teenage suicide behaviours and being a victim of cyberbullying.

According to existing studies, teenagers who bully others are more likely to eventually engage in cyberbullying (Chu et al., 2018; Giumetti et al., 2022). According to research, people who engage in cyberbullying are also more likely to engage in offline bullying later (Pabian and Vandebosch, 2016). Likewise, increasing cyberbullying victimization is

predicted by higher levels of bullying victimization (Giumetti et al., 2022), and vice versa (Chu et al., 2018; Pabian and Vandebosch, 2016), and the above authors were referenced in (Camacho, 2022). In cyberbullying, the aggression not necessarily has to be repeated over time by the same person (resending videos or images by others is a way of repeating the aggressive action), there is a higher probability to disengagement chances, and there is not a clear interdependence between the victim and the aggressor (Huang et al., 2022). Although some researchers state that there is no clear interdependence between the victim and the aggressor, other researchers who have studied this phenomenon for example, (Nandi, et al., 2022; Jaiswal, 2021; Sharma et al., 2022), in their studies have considered memes as a form of cyberbullying, where else (Lee et al., 2017), does not consider the emerging memes as a form of cyberbullying. this writer has a bit of a divergence when it comes to memes being considered as part of cyberbullying. However, according to the findings during the interviews one participant she shared that, *“someone in class took a picture of me turned into a meme posted it online and put a picture of an elephant next to it and compared me to an elephant, that made me feel sad because I am big”*. The issue whether memes are part of cyberbullying or not differs contextually. For example, other schoolers suggest that this phenomenon needs to be studied indigenously (Butt, 2020).

In a study conducted by (Zhang et al., 2019). According to meta-analytic results, 15% of US students said they have either been the target or the perpetrator of cyberbullying within the previous 30 days (Modecki et al., 2014). According to (Brochado et al., 2017), prevalence rates in other nations range greatly, from a low of 5.0% in Australia to a high of 23.8% in Canada. Additionally, a recent small-scale survey indicates that victims and perpetrators of cyberbullying may have grown after the pandemic, maybe because of students' greater use of technology (Jain et al., 2020). According to global statistics, bullying in schools is becoming a more common issue, which undermines children's safety and general well-being while also violating their right to an education (Olweus et al., 2019:70). According to UNESCO's report on bullying and school violence, 246 million kids worldwide are victims of bullying and school violence each year (UNESCO, 2017:9), as cited in Shumba (2023). While Internet addiction is significantly predicted by cyberbullying victimization but leads to future cyberbullying perpetration, Internet access and (social media) use, as well as online risky behaviours such as meeting strangers online or being exposed to violent content, all proved to be significant longitudinal risk factors of both cyberbullying victimization and perpetration (Camerini, 2020).

2.7. Literature in South African context.

South African literature about bullying and cyberbullying in schools will be examined under this subtopic. Because online harassment and intimidation are becoming more common, cyberbullying is becoming a bigger problem in South Africa. A Mandela Metropolitan University poll revealed that 37% of students have experienced cyberbullying, according to the South African Depression and Anxiety Group (SADAG). Students in South African schools face a variety of bullying types, including cyberbullying, emotional, psychological, and physical bullying “Network 2023”.

The proliferation of mobile devices and technical advancements have led to the emergence of a new type of bullying known as cyberbullying (Reyneke and Jacobs, 2018:68). Referenced by (Shumba, 2023). Mostly it affects teenage pupils, cyberbullying has grown to be a significant problem in the modern day (Ghansah, 2022), and because of the ability to hide behind screen aliases and look anonymous, traditional forms of bullying have been extended to online platforms. Children who have been the targets of internet harassment consequently go back to school. He added that the Internet enables an infinite number of people to participate on social networking sites such as Facebook and YouTube, allowing bystanders and cyber-voyeurs to publish embarrassing videotapes, harsh insults, and explicit threats in addition to spreading false rumours and jokes (Ghansah, 2022). Bullying and other forms of child abuse are among the main causes of human society's regress (Ghansah, 2022).

There has been evidence over time that cyberbullying is becoming more prevalent in school settings. According to a research conducted in Malawian schools, 50% of 2,264 students said they had experienced peer bullying. The victims of bullying ultimately turned to unhealthy coping mechanisms including substance misuse and social disengagement (Blumenfeld, 2023). According to (Farhangpour et al., 2019), 36.3% of students in grades 8 and 11 in a school in Durban were found to be experiencing the aftereffects of cyberbullying, while 52% of Grade 8 students in a school in Cape Town were being bullied. Most students in schools lack the skills necessary to protect themselves against online harassment. This means that educators need to be adequately equipped with training and knowledge on how to manage cases of cyberbullying in schools. As cited by (Blumenfeld, 2023).

According to (Snyder, De Brey, and Dillow, 2017), approximately one-fifth of all kids (21%) report being harassed at some point in their schooling, affecting over 5 million children each year. Bullied children are more likely to develop depression, anxiety, sleep problems, poor academic performance, and eventually drop out of school. Patchin and Hinduja, found that roughly 34% of students have experienced cyberbullying at some point in their lives and that over 60% of students who have experienced cyberbullying said it has had a significant impact on their ability to learn and feel safe at school. According to (Anderson and Jiang, 2018), 59 percent of American teenagers have been bullied or harassed online, and over 90% believe it is a big issue for kids their age. Children all over the world are becoming increasingly technologically savvy (Ghansah, 2022).

Sam, (2018) cited, Patchin and Hinduja (2010). The effects of cyberbullying can be long lasting and have been shown to have traumatic effects on the victims including serious psychological damage, such as anxiety, depression, and other serious stress and emotional-related disorders. According to (Peterson and Densley, 2017), antisocial personality traits including narcissism and psychopathy are a strong predictor of cyberbullying. Additional individual risk factors for adolescents who have experienced cyber-victimization include ethnicity, disability, weight, lack of self-control, social anxiety, aggressive thoughts, low social intelligence, and moral collapse (Kowalski et al., 2019).

2.8. Effects of cyberbullying.

The social wellness of students in schools is negatively impacted by cyberbullying. Students may encounter online abuse when they use computers, smartphones, and other electronic devices to connect with others, learn academic material, and socialise. They may engage in cyberbullying at school as perpetrators, victims, or spectators because of their social media use. (Piccoli et al., 2020), In a study by (Chikwuere et al., 2022), cyberbullying has a psychosocial impact and ramifications for students who use social media, repeatedly undermining their success and academic advancement. Similarly, victims of online victimisation experienced unfavourable emotional, social, cognitive, behavioural, and academic effects, according to a Tanzanian study by (Onditi, 2017). This is consistent with the existing studies showing that being a victim of cyberbullying can lead to elevated aggression over time (Lozano-Blasco et al., 2020).

A report from the Centre for Justice and Crime Prevention states that bullying, and violence exposure can also have a detrimental impact on young people's academic performance, increasing their likelihood of missing school and performing poorly in class. Cyberbullying is a serious issue for people and communities around South Africa because it has occasionally even resulted in suicide. Cyberbullying has an influence that extends beyond the victim; it can also have repercussions on friends, family, and the larger community, fostering a climate of distrust and dread “Network 2023”.

(Brochado et al., 2017), reviewed 159 papers and discovered that a collection of Canadian studies had the highest median prevalence of cyberbullying (23.8%, ranging from 1.9% to 65.0%). Numerous research has demonstrated the correlations between psychological characteristics and problematic social media use (e.g., Banyai et al. 2017; Cudo et al., 2020; Kircaburun et al., 2020; Shensa et al., 2017). For example, (Wartberg et al., 2020), discovered that problematic social media use was linked to higher levels of depression symptoms, decreased interpersonal trust, and poorer family functioning (Chukwuere et al., 2021), who studied the psychosocial effects of social media in African countries, found that cyberbullying had educational implications. The study revealed that learners were missing classes, quitting school, and disliking interactions with other learners because they had been bullied on social networks. Cybervictimization have been shown to have detrimental short- and long-term effects on people's academic, social, emotional, and cognitive development. Negative feelings like grief, anger, disappointment, embarrassment, and fear are brought on by cyberbullying (Hinduja and Patchin, 2017). Ethnicity, handicap, weight, lack of self-control, social anxiety, aggressive ideas, low social intelligence, and moral breakdown are additional individual risk factors for adolescents who have been cyber-victims (Kowalski et al., 2019).

Cyberbullying has become a global issue due to the increasing use of laptops, tablets, and cell phones (Campbell, 2005) as cited by (Mutshaeni, 2019). Cyberbullying is a major issue, according to 80% of participants in a study of 18,000 people from countries like Argentina, Australia, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, China, France, Germany, Great Britain, Hungary, India, Indonesia, Italy, Japan, Mexico, Poland, Russia, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, South Korea, Spain, Sweden, Turkey, and the USA (Reuters, 2012). According to NoBully.com (2016), in March 2016, more than 1.1 million people came to their website in a single month to get assistance with cyberbullying, as referenced by (Mutshaeni, 2019).

Mutshaeni, (2019) cited a research by Deschamps & McNutt (2016). According to research, victims of cyberbullying may suffer severe consequences and suffer lifelong scarring. For example, Jankowiak (2024). Agree that cyberbullying is widely known to have several detrimental effects, such as poor academic performance in class and overall, decreased school satisfaction, and a decreased dedication to learning and education in general. Students that have a negative opinion of the school will avoid it and frequently miss class without any explanation. Psychological distress and suicidal thoughts or actions are associated with cyberbullying. It poses a serious risk to the growth and psychological well-being of both victims and perpetrators.

Cyberbullying and inappropriate social media use have been linked in recent studies (Kircaburun et al., 2019). Additionally, (Kircaburun et al., 2020) found that those who engage in cyberbullying score lower on self-esteem and higher on dissociative experiences, depression, childhood emotional trauma, Cluster B personality traits (narcissistic, histrionic, anti-social, and borderline), problematic social media use, and dissociative experiences. Adolescents who have experienced victimisation may exhibit impulsive, angry, and aggressive behaviours in response to perceived provocation (Sullivan et al., 2021). Teenagers who are frequently irritated may grow irritated and act aggressively (Paquin et al., 2017). The above schoolers agree on the fact that those who suffer from these negative mental states could use social media excessively as a coping mechanism to evade or escape their unpleasant reality. Because of their elevated levels of anxiety and sadness, victims of cyberbullying may develop aggressive tendencies (Tosuntaş et al., 2020). One might wonder how cyberbullying might cause bodily harm to young people.

The increased scholastic and psychological difficulties that cyber-victims face may be the cause of their sustained engagement in cyberbullying, as stated by (Watts et al., 2017). Cyberbullying causes negative emotions including anger, frustration, embarrassment, sadness, and fear, and these feelings are all connected to psychiatric issues, guilt, and interpersonal aggression in teenagers. (Hinduja and Patchin, 2017). Boys who are subjected to cyberbullying externalize their experiences, whereas girls internalize them. (Wiguna et al., 2018), He continue saying that boys who are cyber-victims have higher rates of smoking and alcohol consumption than those who are not, meanwhile girls have higher rates of alcohol abuse and suicide attempts compared to their peers. Additionally, other researchers on cyberbullying added by saying that, women, girls, and members of racial and ethnic

minorities are particularly vulnerable to cyberbullying (Broll et al., 2018; Carlson & Frazer, 2021).

Other scholars e.g., (Carlson and Frazer, 2021) have completely diverged, by differently challenging the definition of cyberbullying by stating that it ignores sociocultural variations. They criticise the theoretical framework for failing to take sociocultural diversity, complexity, and disparities into consideration. Although they used a different theory (the normative theoretical framework), this is something worth looking at, because looking at the fundamental idea of the social learning theory, which is applied in this study, it posits that people pick up new behaviours through interacting and observing others. However, it truly doesn't consider people's cultures, identities, backgrounds, and the reality that everyone has different experiences and that individuals, particularly teenagers, are a product of those experiences. It turns to presume that people are the same, meaning adolescents in this context, while ignoring that they understand the world differently even their thought processes are completely different.

Various studies have been conducted to measure the prevalence of cyberbullying among adolescents with reference to gender, age, socio-economic status and digital divide variables. According to these studies, findings of the studies revealed that cyberbullying is prevalent and growing, and socio-economic status and digital divide variables have positive impact on the prevalence on cyberbullying, while the results with reference to age and gender are inconsistent (Saleem, 2022). The available literature focuses on correlations between cyberbullying and cyber victimisation (Mkhize and Gopal, 2021), and the correlation between learners' characteristics, such as age, gender, school location, etc., and cyberbullying (Nkwanyana and Nzima, 2022; Govender & Young, 2018; Motswi and Moshegoane, 2017; Campbell et al., 2020; Bayazit, Simsek and Ayhan, 2017; Young and Govender, 2018; Motswi & Moshegoane, 2017; Cilliers and Chinyamurindibi, 2021). Comparatively, there is very limited evidence in the literature regarding the social and psychological impact of cyberbullying on secondary school learners (Chikwuere et al., 2021; Cilliers and Chinyamurindibi, 2021). Particularly in KwaZulu-Natal, Durban.

The present study was conducted to investigate the psychological and social effects of cyberbullying among adolescent girls on a secondary school in KwaZulu-Natal, by answering the following questions: What do adolescents think cyberbullying is? What are social and

psychological effects of cyberbullying? What are underlying factors influencing cyberbullying among adolescents? Do adolescent girls who engage in cyberbullying realize the impact of their actions on others? The findings of this study could help in terms of exploring the understanding of cyberbullying among these adolescents in question, and by also adding to the existing literature in this phenomenon.

Cyberbullying may adversely affect learners' social wellbeing in schools. When learners navigate computers, cell phones, and other electronic gadgets to acquire academic information, relate to and socialise with others, they may experience online harassment. Through their social involvement on social media, they can become perpetrators, victims, or bystanders in cyberbullying behaviour at school (Piccoli et al., 2020). Distinguish between informational influence and referential informational social influence. Informational influence refers to new information or arguments provided in a group discussion that change a group member's attitudes, beliefs, or behaviour, while normative influence is conformity based on one's desire to fulfil others' expectations to gain acceptance (Piccoli et al., 2020), by being surrounded by peers who bully online, a learner may become involved in cyberbullying behaviour as a victim, a perpetrator, or a spectator.

There is quite a significant body of literature, both globally and locally, that discusses the effects of cyberbullying behaviour on learners (Mkhize and Gopal, 2021; Nkwanyana and Nzima, 2022; Govender and Young, 2018; Campbell et al., 2020; Motswi and Moshegoane, 2017; Cilliers & Chinyamurindibi, 2021). However, there is very limited evidence in the literature regarding the understanding of the perpetrator's experiences in secondary schools, particularly in KwaZulu-Natal, very few scholars have taken interest to explore the perpetrators upbringing because people or adolescents are shaped by their experiences. In short in this regard, more exploration studies on how school children learn cyberbullying perpetration is needed, more qualitative studies are needed to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon. It can also add to the existing knowledge in understanding the phenomenon. Because most researchers of cyberbullying use online surveys and these online surveys may not generalise the results for either victims or perpetrators.

2.9. Conclusion.

In this literature review chapter, the researcher reviewed what various scholars, both local and international say about cyberbullying among young adolescents. What do authors think is a problem and how it can be solved, because schools are faced with a lot of difficulties on the day-day running of the school. The impacts of cyberbullying activity on students is covered in a sizable body of literature, both locally and internationally.

The literature that is currently accessible focusses on the relationships between cyberbullying and cybervictimization as well as the relationships between cyberbullying and learner characteristics such age, gender, school location, etc. Some academics have even gone so far as to link cyberbullying to problems with children's and teens' mental health, antisocial behaviour, and suicide thoughts. Other academics scholars bullying typically referred to youth violence that affected kids and teenagers in school environments. Cyberbullying, however, has emerged because of technological improvements that have made online aggressiveness simpler.

This definition has been contested by some academics who argue that it ignores sociocultural variations (e.g., Carlson and Frazer, 2021). They criticise the theoretical framework for failing to take into consideration the diversity, complexity, and distinctions between the mainstream populations and sociocultural elements (such as collectivistic culture or the experience of systematic racism). This phenomenon should be studied through contextualised analyses of lived experiences as well as the social and political complexity of cyberbullying. Other scholars in the field of cyberbullying challenge the definition of cyberbullying on the basis that it's not clear e.g., (Englander, 2018). That is why the phenomenon keeps rising despite the extensive literature readily available on cyberbullying, and another literature emphasise either perpetrators or victim.

This study examines both roles which are perpetrators and victims, enriching understanding of how girls internalise and enact cyberbullying behaviours within the school setting. The study will also explore the girl perpetrators experiences in trying to find out why a girl child would want to be involved in a cyberbullying act. Other scholars e.g., (Juan, Zuze, Hannan, Govender and Reddy, 2018:1), strongly associates bullying in South African schools with all types of violence including cyberbullying, shooting etc.

CHAPTER THREE: THEORETICAL APPROACH.

3.1. Introduction.

This chapter outlines the theoretical framework guiding the study, which is Albert Bandura's Social learning theory (SLT). Social learning theory was used to explain the study. The chapter begins by describing the historical origins and the key ideas of the theory, and then move to explain how these ideas apply to the phenomenon of cyberbullying among adolescent girls in the school settings. Cyberbullying is a social and psychological problem, adolescents do not act in isolation, when it comes to it. They are influenced by what they see, hear, and experience in their everyday lives as well as social media platforms. Social learning theory helps us to understand these influences because it explains how people learn behaviours by observing others and then reproducing what they have observed. This is important and fits the current study because it helps explain both the behaviour of perpetrators and victims within the school environment.

3.2 Historical origin of Social Learning Theory.

A theoretical framework is defined as an empirical theory of social and/or psychological processes at various levels that can be applied to understanding a phenomenon. (Tamene, 2016). He further states that cyberbullying has become a pervasive issue, particularly among adolescents who use social media frequently. Various theories help explain the factors contributing to this phenomenon.

Albert Bandura first introduced social learning theory in the early 1970's, building on earlier behaviorist ideas. Behaviourists such as Skinner had argued that behaviour is shaped mainly by reinforcement and punishment. Bandura agreed with this but later added a critical new dimension: people also learn by simply watching others. His famous Bobo doll experiment (1971) is a good example. In this study, children who saw adults acting aggressively towards a doll were more likely themselves to imitate that aggressive behaviour. This shows that children can learn new behaviours without being directly rewarded or punished, they simply learn by observing others. This insight became the foundation of social learning theory. Bandura argued that human behaviour is shaped by a constant interaction between personal factors, (thoughts, feelings, motivations). Behaviour itself, and the surrounding environment. Bandura later expanded this theory into Social cognitive theory, which emphasised mental

processes such as attention, memory, and self-regulation (Bandura, 2011). In today's social media era, this theory is particularly relevant. Adolescents are constantly exposed to models of behaviour, not only from peers and celebrities, influencers, and strangers from online. If they see harmful behaviour such as cyberbullying rewarded with attention, likes, or social status, they may be more likely to copy it themselves (Chan et al., 2022).

There are various theories used to explain human behaviour. For this study, social learning theory was used to describe the behaviour of young girls on cyberbullying. The focus is on the behaviour of both the victim and the perpetrator. Bandura (1971) asserts that learning would be exceedingly laborious, not to mention hazardous, if people had to rely solely on the effects of their actions to inform them what to do. Fortunately, most human behaviour is learned observationally through modeling: from observing others, one forms an idea of how new behaviours are performed, and on later occasions, this coded information serves as a guide for action", and social learning theory explains human behaviour in terms of continuous reciprocal interaction between cognitive, behavioural, and environmental influences.

3.3. Social learning theory as a learned behaviour.

Before we delve deep into the evidence that cyberbullying can be explained from a learning perspective, it is imperative to understand learning theory. That is, what processes and variables are important for social behaviour to be learned? By learning, we mean changes in the behaviour of an organism that result from regularities in the environment of the organism (Barlett, 2023). Learning, in this context, refers to changes in behaviour that results from repeated patterns in the environment (Barlett, 2023). For example, when a teenager sees a peer being mocked online and notices that the bully gains social approval, they can conclude that the behaviour is acceptable or even desirable.

The Bobo doll experiment demonstrated this principle in a controlled setting, but the same processes apply in real life. Parents, Friends, Teachers, the media, and now social media all provide models of behaviour. Through observing, imitating, and sometimes experiencing reinforcement, adolescents form patterns of behaviour. In relation to cyberbullying, this means that harmful behaviours can spread across peer groups. If a learner sees friends sharing hurtful memes or leaving negative comments online, they may join in-not necessarily out of

malice but because they are influenced by group norms and the desire to belong. Over time, repeated exposure can normalise such behaviours.

3.4. The core concept of social learning theory.

The core concept of social learning theory stipulates that people can learn new behaviours by observing and interacting with others. This also refers to the reciprocal relationship between social characteristics of the environment, how they are perceived by individuals, and how motivated and able a person is to reproduce behaviors they see happening around them (Bandura, 2011).

The core concept of social learning theory includes:

- **Observational learning:** people can learn new behaviours by watching others.
- **Imitation and modelling:** behaviours are copied, especially if the model is admired, powerful, or similar in age and status.
- **Reinforcement:** behaviours are repeated when they bring rewards, such as attention, popularity, or social approval.
- **Reciprocal determinism:** behaviour is shaped not only by external factors but also by personal thoughts and feelings and in turn, behaviour influences the environment.

For adolescents these concepts are highly relevant to them, teenagers spend much of their time observing peers online, comparing themselves and seeking approval. As Berger (2015) notes, social learning theory emphasises that human beings are social learners, we pick up behaviour by interacting with and observing others in social context.

3.5. Application of social learning Theory.

Bullying has long been understood as a social problem, and social learning theory offers a lens to explain how it spreads. Bandura (1976) and later Swearer (2014) suggested that behaviours like bullying are maintained not just by individual traits but by the broader social environment. In the case of cyberbullying social learning theory helps explain both perpetration and victimization:

For perpetrators: adolescents may see cyberbullying behaviours modelled by peers or online influencers. If those perpetrators are rewarded with likes, laughter, or status, others may imitate the behaviour. Social media platforms amplify this effect because the reinforcement (e.g., gaining followers) is immediate and visible.

Examples, how perpetrators model this behaviour in an all-girls school: The theory explains that a child becomes a bully by learning and imitating harmful behaviours she or he observed in his or her environment, e.g., school. In an all-girls school setting, for example. Adolescent girls become perpetrators because they observed cyberbullying behaviour from their peers or observed what was done to them, meaning they observed it and later modelled the behaviour. According to the findings from the interviews, most of the participant perpetrators stated that they were victims of cyberbullying, then they retaliated because they wanted to take revenge, meaning they observed the behaviour. e.g., by Modelling: teens see others cyberbullying (peers, influencers, streamers, or parents). If the bully gain likes, laughs, or social dominance, others re-posting and the bully gets away with it, others think it's cool. Positive reinforcement, getting attention, popularity, or online group approval. Other scholars, for example, (Piccoli et al., 2020), concur with social learning theory by stating that, being surrounded by peers who bully online, a learner may become involved in cyberbullying behaviour as a victim, a perpetrator, or a spectator. Norms: if a group tolerates or encourages cyberbullying, the behaviour spreads. Vicarious reinforcement: observing others bully without consequence encourages the belief that this is acceptable.

For victims: Social learning theory also explains how victims may internalise bullying experiences. Adolescents who are repeatedly targeted may withdraw, isolate themselves, or even adopt bullying behaviours themselves, repeating what was modelled for them. Bystanders observe and play a role. When peers witness cyberbullying but fail to intervene, this passivity can reinforce the idea that the behaviour is normal and acceptable.

Example, in terms of victims, social learning theory states that if children do not feel good about themselves, they may develop negative behaviour patterns and emotional responses which are internalised and manifested in school settings. In the school in question, for example, during the interviews, most of the victim participants shared that since the cyberbullying incident, they isolate themselves, they fear that others are judging them, and after being cyberbullied, they have difficulties building trust with their peers. For example,

with these adolescents, if a learner posts harmful comments about her peer, then it spreads like wildfire in the school, other students make fun of her, friends share and re-post, and their followers increase, and the one who posted the comment gets no discipline because of the anonymity that comes with cyberspace. In that way, cyberbullying spreads throughout the school, and the perpetrators gain high social status. So, without consequences and positive modelling, the cyberbullying behaviour escalates. These adolescent girls in this school who engage in cyberbullying use social media platforms to target their victims. Platforms like Instagram, WhatsApp channels, Snapchat, and TikTok, where they create fake accounts and post edited pictures, post hurtful comments, share and repost, etc., because these platforms give them an option to be anonymous to a huge audience. Negative reinforcement: avoiding being a target by turning a blind eye when witnessing a fellow student going through online bullying.

Research supports that these ideas. Studies show that children exposed to aggression at home or among peers are more likely to become bullies themselves (Baldry, 2003; Bowels et al., 2009). Similarly, those surrounded by online peer groups that tolerate bullying are more likely to participate (Piccoli et al., 2020). In the context of the school under the study, social learning theory suggests that girls who engage in cyberbullying may be imitating behaviours they have observed from peers, influencers, or even adults. For example, participants in the study reported that some perpetrators had first been victims themselves and later chose to retaliate, reflecting the cycle of observation and imitating described by Bandura. Therefore, the researcher hypothesised, that these adolescents learned cyberbullying behaviour through observing others' behaviours, attitudes, and the outcomes of those behaviours. Several studies demonstrate a link between observing aggressive behaviours and the perpetration of bullying behaviours among youth (Swearer et al., 2014). For instance, youth who are exposed to violence and aggression in their homes, such as punitive parenting and adverse conflict resolution tactics, are significantly more likely to bully others than those who are not exposed to such behaviours (Young, 2018).

Research demonstrates that the theoretical framework of social learning theory is useful for understanding various forms of cybercrimes; therefore, social learning theory is used to explain cyberbullying, by explaining the link between cyberbullying and cybercrime, because when a person who is perpetrating bullying is not caught, they might graduate to perpetrating serious crime. There are different theories used to explain how people behave. For this study,

social learning theory was used to explain the behaviour of youth on cyberbullying. The most common example of learnt behaviour is television, where mostly young people learn things from watching. However, for this study, the theory explains how behaviour is learnt on social media. Teens are exposed to the internet and learn new behaviours, including being perpetrators of bullying or putting themselves at risk of being victims of cyberbullying, without being aware. The more time spent on social media, the higher the possibility of observing and learning behaviours. For example, adolescents observe all kinds of posts and comments on social media, and they get involved without being aware that they are exposing themselves to cyberbullying. Adolescents may not be aware of what is wrong or right on social media and may expose themselves to different kinds of behaviours on the internet or social media (Gopal, 2021).

Since social learning theory puts forward the idea that people learn from observing, imitating, modelling, and so forth, this theory helps analyse this phenomenon because it suggests that children engage in cyberbullying by observing and imitating others who engage in similar online activities. The theory is relevant to the study because it emphasises that individuals observe and internalize the behaviour and then act. It explains how behaviours are acquired and modelled in the social environment, it also highlights the importance of peers influencing each other on perpetrating cyberbullying by stressing that adolescents are likely to engage in a certain behaviour after observing their peers for example, if a learner in classroom bullying another learner, then those who are watching copy that behaviour and model it even when they observed their role model. When one person performs a behaviour, bystanders become interested and join in the behaviour even though they had no intention to do so.

This concept offers insight as to why cyberbullying is on the rise among school-going adolescents, including the school in question; some students gang up on a targeted student. For example, in the playground, one bully starts to tease another learner, eliciting other girls to join in. Over time, this type of bullying could escalate into more serious, threatening behaviours. Not just in schools, a child for example that is bullied at home and when that child get to school will want to exact the same power on other children, so she becomes a bully because she is being bullied not by peers but by an older person at home, so social learning theory helps analyse that this is a behaviour that has been normalised, or being modelled at home.

Social learning theory grounds my study by analysing that adolescents engage in cyberbullying because they observe, internalise, and model the behaviour, and it helps describe how cyberbullying spreads in schools through observation, imitation, and reinforcement, and how learners' online behaviour is influenced by actions and reactions of peers. Agreeing with social learning theory, Hinduja and Patchin (2013) backed the idea that youth who differentially associate with peers who are perceived to be involved in cyberbullying are more likely to adopt definitions favourable to cyberbullying and subsequently participate in cyberbullying themselves. Therefore, listening to what the father of social learning theory is saying and other writers attesting to what he said, the researcher also hypothesise and say adolescent girls engage in cyberbullying because they observe, internalise and model the behaviour bystanders included, for example, if a child witness her father beating her mother, she will grow up thinking that behaviour is acceptable.

3.6. Conclusion.

In conclusion, the historical origins of the social learning theory have highlighted that the SLT is multi-disciplinary and cannot be boxed or aligned with a discipline. This proves good as it allows for multiple approaches to cyberbullying reduction. It also unpacked the contents of the phenomenon, which helps understand cyberbullying as a complex phenomenon.

Social learning theory provides a strong foundation for understanding the dynamics of cyberbullying among adolescent girls. It highlights that behaviour is not created in isolation but is learned through observing, imitating, and being reinforced by others in both offline and online environment. This theory is useful for analysing the complexity of cyberbullying because it explains how aggressive behaviour can spread through peer groups, become normalised, and even escalate into more serious forms of violence. It also emphasizes the role of victims and bystanders in perpetrating or resisting such behaviours. By applying social learning theory, the study is better able to explore not only why cyberbullying occurs but also how school environment, peer relationships, and social media platforms interact to shape the behaviour of adolescent girls.

CHAPTER FOUR: METHODOLOGY.

4.1. Introduction.

This chapter explores how we can go about addressing the issue of Cyberbullying on the school grounds or environment amongst teenage girls. To achieve this, this research used a qualitative research methodology where data was collected mainly using individual interviews. Qualitative research methodology will enable the researcher to solicit information from the participants about their experiences of being cyberbullied in a school environment, it is with such information at hand that relevant stakeholders in the education system such as the department of Education, school counsellors, parents, guardians, teachers and learners themselves can be able to develop plans and strategies that can be helpful in improving or curbing high rate of cyberbullying in schools.

4.2. Research Methodology: Qualitative.

Qualitative approach is a process of naturalistic inquiry that seeks an in-depth understanding of social phenomena within a particular setting, and it involves collecting and analyzing data to understand experiences and opinions (Gertrudia Maria Steyn, Gunam Dolan Singh, 2018). The qualitative research approach was chosen for the study because seeks to give a clear understanding of participants' views and experiences. They further state that this approach involves a social constructivist paradigm, which is concerned about understanding people's lived experiences in the context of the circumstances of their lives, which in this case is cyberbullying amongst adolescent girls in a high school level. Holloway and Wheeler (1996) also affirm that qualitative research typically studies people or systems by interacting with and observing the participants in their natural environment and by focusing on their meanings and interpretations.

A qualitative research method was employed in this study to investigate the problem through interviews with participants from the school in question, aiming to gain deeper insight into the perspectives of adolescent girls. This approach is appropriate, as qualitative research allows for the exploration of rich, in-depth meanings and detailed experiences. The researcher, put herself in the participants' shoes to understand their experiences from their point of view; it involves gathering a lot of information about a small number of people.

4.3 Sampling.

A total number of ten adolescent girls from Mowat Park High School in KwaZulu-Natal aged 15 and 18 years from grades 10 to 12. Participants were chosen based on their reported experiences of either having experienced or perpetrated cyberbullying within the school context. The study consists of seven participants who have personally experienced cyberbullying on school premises. The researcher has been working with these seven for the past two years. Three additional participants have perpetrated cyberbullying in the school. The researcher knows these individuals through professional social work counselling due to their repeated involvement in such incidents. This ongoing behaviour prompted the researcher's curiosity about the root causes behind these actions.

The participants were purposely selected by the researcher due to the relatively higher level of cyberbullying in the school and their involvement in it, the researcher used purposive sampling because the study wanted to select participants with specific characteristics, which in this study it was learners who have experienced cyberbullying. Ball (1990) states that purposive sampling is mostly used to access people who are knowledgeable about issues based on a variety of factors such as power and experiences. The researcher is currently placed at the school as a junior social work intern and has engaged directly with learners through her professional role. It was through this engagement that the high prevalence of cyberbullying was first observed, and various corrective strategies, including parental involvement, have been implemented as part of the researcher's internship duties, particularly in the school in question.

4.4. Recruitment process.

The recruitment of participants took place in Mowat park girl's High School, where the research study was conducted; as the researcher, I followed a formal research process, independent of my professional role. Participants were recruited using purposive sampling, which allows for the selection of individuals based on specific, relevant characteristics – in this case, their prior involvement in or exposure to cyberbullying. Importantly, all participants were approached individually and confidentially by the researcher. The purpose of the study, ethical considerations (including confidentiality, voluntary participation), and the requirement for parental consent (for those under 18) was clearly explained. Participants were assured that they may withdraw from the study at any time, without consequence. To

minimize bias, the research adhered strictly to the research objectives and questions to ensure that participants understood the importance of providing honest and accurate responses. Clearly defining the research problem, avoid framing questions in a way that suggests a preferred outcome, use consistent instructions and protocols for all participants.

The participants were chosen from grades 10 to 12, the researcher selected two groups (samples). The participants in question are suitable for the study because the researcher has engaged and still are engaging with them in terms of counselling learners, and these are learners who display signs of outbursts, isolation, lack of positivity, absenteeism, and difficulties making friends due to feeling socially unacceptable; and perpetrators, who exhibit domineering and defensive behaviours and are frequently in trouble. Ten learners were chosen as a sample of seven was deemed adequate for this small-scale qualitative study, given the time constraints, and chose three perpetrators because they volunteered to participate in the study.

4.2 Data Collection.

Data was collected through semi-structured interviews, which explored two main variables: cyberbullying effects on a psychological level and the social level related to cyberbullying. A qualitative approach was used to investigate the cyberbullying problem through interview processes with the participants in the school in question, because qualitative research is a major branch of inquiry in the social sciences, encompassing a wide range of phenomena. Qualitative studies share a naturalistic and situated concern as the basis of their inquiry; they seek to study phenomena through a person's perspective, paying attention to the context where they emerge (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Given this aim, experience and meaning are crucial for understanding participants' perspectives, enhancing qualitative comprehension of the social and psychological effects of this phenomenon (Daher, 2017). The researcher asked open-ended questions to enable participants to share their experiences.

4.2.1. Data Analysis.

Data analysis involves collecting raw data and turning it into information that supports decision-making. Once the data was collected, thematic analysis was chosen to identify and

interpret patterns of meaning, or themes, within the qualitative data. (Clarke and Braun, 2017).

Thematic analysis is a process of identifying patterns or themes within a qualitative study. Data analysis plays a fundamental role in determining the credibility of the qualitative research due to its ability to enable the researcher to understand, interpret, and describe experiences of the participants, which are key in uncovering meaning in particular circumstances and the contexts (MacGuire and Delahunt, 2017, p. 3351).

Thematic analysis was used to examine the data, as it helps identify recurring themes in qualitative research. This approach supports understanding human thoughts, experiences, and emotions. Data analysis is important for evaluating the validity of qualitative research because it helps researchers interpret and describe participant experiences, which is key to understanding meaning in different situations (MacGuire and Delahunt, 2017). This section will outline six steps of analysis. i.e.

- **Step 1: Familiarizing myself with data.**

The researcher immersed herself in the data (Braun and Clarke, 2012), by reading the transcripts multiple times in order to be familiar with the data transcripts. The researcher made notes as she was reading through the transcripts, as it allows the researcher to read words actively and analytically instead of just absorbing the surface meaning of what is said by the participants.

- **Step 2: Generated essential codes.**

Codes are building blocks of the analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2012). The researcher therefore generated essential codes according to the data transcripts and manually coded them separately by highlighting them.

- **Step 3: Searched for themes.**

The researcher searched for themes and used descriptive themes which made it easy for me to group them after coding.

- **Step 4: Reviewed and modified themes.**

The researcher then reviewed and modified themes that have emerged, by grouping transcribed according to their colours.

- **Step 5: Defining themes.**

The definition of themes according to (Braun & Clarke, 2012), is the final stage where themes are refined to identify the core of each theme.

- **Step 6: Writing up.**

Writing up the data analysis chapter was guided by themes that had emerged from the transcripts.

The in-depth interviews were transcribed, the data after it was collected; this is an essential step since it turns the data into text (qualitative analysis). In the study interviews were audio-recorded, and then data transcript was made, all interviews were conducted in both isiZulu and English. The transcription process was conducted I transcribe everything and typed it, then translated it into English and typed it on the computer. Data transcription is followed by coding, which is the process by which the researcher examines participant replies to identify emergent concerns that are emphasised. The goal of thematic analysis is to identify important themes in the data and use these themes to address the study or highlight an issue (MacGuire & Delahunt, 2017).

4.2.2 Ethical Consideration.

Research ethics is a vital element of the study because it prevents the abuse of participants' rights in the name of social research. Ethics ensures that the research undertaken contributes and adds value to the community/society. Research ethics also ensures that people with diminished autonomy, such as minors or prisoners, are protected, as (Bless et al., 2014:27) posit that "Social science research is a source of power which can be used for social benefit. The consent form gives the participants the option of choosing to record their interview or have the interview off the record.

In qualitative research, ethical consideration is very important as it ensures the morality of the research process. Ethical considerations include confidentiality, emotional safety, and

informed consent (Hisada, 2003). As the researcher, I was aware of the sensitivity around issues of being a victim of Cyberbullying, and it was important that ethical considerations were addressed with the participants. In qualitative research, ethical issues must be considered to avoid any obstacle that might arise (Lemmer & van Wyk, 2006; Nkani, 2012). These considerations are paramount in working with children for ethical approval. The first approach for the research was to contact the head of the school (Principal) in writing to request permission to conduct the study. All approval procedures performed in studies involving human participants were in accordance with the ethical standards of the University of KwaZulu-Natal, where the researcher applied for ethical clearance, and was approved for the researcher to be able to collect data.

This process entailed obtaining informed consent from both participants and their parents or caregivers, minimising potential risks, ensuring anonymity and confidentiality, avoiding deception, and allowing participants the right to withdraw at any time. Informed consent ensured that adolescents and their parents fully understood the study's purpose, procedures, and participants' rights. All data collected was anonymized and securely stored, with protective measures in place to minimise any risks or discomfort. Participants had the option to skip any questions they found uncomfortable, with no negative consequences. Arrangements were made with Siza community care centre for counselling referrals since the study may evoke memories.

4.2.3 Data Security and Confidentiality.

To safeguard participant information, forms with identifiers will be securely stored in locked cabinets within locked research offices. Each participant will receive a unique identifier, and all study data will be entered on encrypted, password-protected tablets, accessible only to authorised personnel. The study upholds the integrity and dignity of participants, adhering to ethical guidelines established by UKZN's ethical clearance office. Issues of anonymity and confidentiality were assured by hiding the participant's real identity.

All information shared by participants during the study will be treated as strictly confidential and used solely for research purposes. However, participants were informed at the outset that there are ethical and legal limits to confidentiality. Specifically, if a participant discloses information that indicates they are at risk of harm, pose a risk to others, or are involved in

illegal activities that have serious implications (e.g., extortion or abuse), the researcher will be ethically obligated to breach confidentiality.

Participants were fully informed of these limitations before any data collection begins. This will be clearly explained during the consent process and reiterated verbally before interviews. Participants were told that, should such a situation arise, the researcher will need to share the information with relevant professionals, such as a qualified social worker, psychologist, or healthcare provider, to ensure the safety and wellbeing of those involved. Importantly, participants will also be assured that they will be informed beforehand if such a step becomes necessary.

4.2.4 Limitations.

Limitations of the study would be that the sample size is small, this means that the results cannot be generalized to other girls experiencing the same issue. The study only made use of the authorities in terms of gatekeeper role, but they were not part of the interview process of which they could have added their perspective of their role in aiding for livelihoods of which could have been balanced viewpoints from both parties for comparison. The study focused only on the victims and perpetrators of cyberbullying, the ones that already know their situation, while ignoring the bystanders, who could also contribute according to their observations and given insight as this would give richer data.

4.2.5 Conclusion.

This chapter outlined the qualitative methodology used to explore the experiences of adolescent girls affected by cyberbullying in a school environment. Purposive sampling was employed to select participants with direct experience as either victims or perpetrators. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews conducted in isiZulu and English, then transcribed, translated, and analysed using thematic analysis. Ethical considerations such as informed consent, confidentiality, and emotional support were prioritised throughout. The methods detailed here form the foundation for the analysis of findings presented in the next chapter.

Then the use of thematic analysis method for analysing data was discussed in this chapter. The researcher outlined the ethical considerations that were taken into consideration in this study. The next chapter will focus on data analysis, and it must be noted that in analysing the data, the researcher used the translation of all the statements that were made in isiZulu. All the statements that have been written in italic are direct quotes from the participants and all the statements were translated from Zulu to English.

CHAPTER FIVE

Data Analysing and Discussion.

5.1. Introduction.

The process of data analysis can be defined as cleansing and converting data to find relevant information for commercial decision-making. Extracting valuable information from data and making decisions based on that information is the goal of data analysis (Islam, 2020). In qualitative studies, data analysis involves classifying and interpreting linguistic (or visual) content to draw conclusions about the implicit and explicit dimensions and structures of meaning-making in the material (Mezmir, 2020). Mezmir further notes that qualitative data analysis frequently blends methods of a deep analysis such as the elaboration of categories, hermeneutic interpretations, or discovered structures, with more surfaced level methods, such as overviews, condensation, and summaries.

In the current study, both perpetrators and victims of cyberbullying were interviewed separately. Perpetrators were identified by the researcher, as learners referred by the teachers for counselling, while the victims were identified through referral systems in line with school protocols for managing bullying cases, as mentioned that the participants are known to the researcher in the methodology section. This separation allowed the researcher to capture the unique perspectives of both groups while maintaining ethical safeguards. The purpose of this chapter is to present and discuss the findings of the study in relation to the social and psychological effects of cyberbullying among adolescent girls. The analysis involved transcribing interviews, coding data, and generating recurrent themes. This approach amplifies the voice of participants and provides insight to the phenomenon as experienced by both victims and perpetrators.

5.2. Findings from the Perpetrators.

This study investigates the social and psychological effects of cyberbullying among adolescent girls and consists of two samples both perpetrators and victims. This chapter outlines the discussing and analysing of the data from the interviews with the participants of the study from both samples, seven victims and three perpetrators. The first part of the study focuses on perpetrators of cyberbullying. Three participants who had been referred for

counselling were interviewed. Their accounts were to examine how they define cyberbullying and how they perceived their involvement. When asked to define cyberbullying, perpetrators an awareness of its broad form:

- Participant perpetrator 1: *“Cyberbullying is making someone feel uncomfortable via the media, “bullying via the Internet.”*
- Participant perpetrator 2: *“It’s when you say bad things about a person or when you post pictures of someone on the internet” or when you are spreading rumours online that are not true about that person”.*
- Participant perpetrator 3: *“I do understand what cyberbullying is, it is bullying a person online by posting videos, pictures, or sending hurtful messages about another person with the aim of making them feel bad or make other people laugh at them or make them feel small”.*

These are responses I got from the perpetrator participants. These responses show that perpetrators generally understand cyberbullying as an online form of aggression, though their definition vary in dept. Research indicate that much of the literature on cyberbullying, tends to focus on the experiences of victim with limited attention given to perpetrators (Estevez, Musitu, & Herrero, 2005). This study contributes to closing the gap by exploring how perpetrators themselves makes sense of their behaviour.

5.2.1. Themes from perpetrators’ account.

The overall findings of Part 1 of the study, which focusses on the perpetrators of cyberbullying, was to investigate their experiences; the results presented here are mainly from the themes, since there is not much literature on cyberbullying perpetration. Through my own research process, I was able to pick up that these adolescents lack understanding of the phenomenon, I can’t say it’s a new knowledge, but I would rather say it’s the piece of information that is overlooked because before we debate about the clarity of the definition, we need to be clear about whether they understand the meaning of the word cyberbullying. Thematic analysis of perpetrators’ transcripts revealed the following recurrent theme:

- Insufficient comprehension of the phenomenon- Participants could describe examples of cyberbullying but often demonstrated only surface-level of understanding.

- Anger and lack of confidence- Some perpetrators admitted that their actions were driven by negative emotions and low self-esteem.
- Motivated by revenge- Perpetrators indicated that retaliating against those who had wronged them was a key motivator.
- Self-defence- Others framed their actions as protective, arguing that they had to “fight back online” to avoid further victimisation.
- Victims of cyberbullying/bullying by their peers- Most of the perpetrators reported having been bullied first, suggesting the cycle of victimization and retaliation.
- Victims of domestic and sexual abuse- A deeper theme that emerged was that some perpetrators’ aggressive behaviours were linked to trauma and negative experiences in their childhood.

5.2.1.1 Lack of understanding of the phenomenon.

Lack of understanding refers to the absence of insight or comprehension about a subject. In the context of cyberbullying, it means perpetrators fail to fully grasp the nature, seriousness, and consequences of the harm inflicted on victims. When asked whether they had ever posted about someone with the intention of hurting them, all participants admitted that they had engaged in such behaviours but downplayed their impact:

- Perpetrator Participant 1: *“I thought it was fun didn’t make much of it”. I took a screen shot and sent it to my friends with the aim of making fun of her and we laughed at her. I knew it was not ok, but I did it anyways like I said I didn’t even think that would hurt her, I thought it was fun.*
- Perpetrators Participant 2: *“but when it’s a person I don’t like I also add my own speech”.*

These responses illustrate that while participants understood what cyberbullying is, but they lacked comprehension of its seriousness and emotional impact on the victims. This answers objective one of the study which sought to investigate adolescent girl’s understanding of cyberbullying. This aligns with research suggesting that anonymity and detachment in online spaces often reduce empathy and moral responsibility (Zych et al., 2017; Tokunaga 2010). Some perpetrators disguise harmful behaviours as “revenge seeking” or “fun”, failing to recognise the consequences of their actions. Because of cyberbullies narrow understanding,

they may think that because their insults are not spoken in person therefore, that will minimise the victims pain they will probably take it as a joke.

Englander et, al. (2017) argues that disagreement over the definition of cyberbullying continues to affect research, with adolescents' limited comprehension of the phenomenon contributing to inconsistent responses and ineffective solutions. The findings of the study confirms that cyberbullies' narrow understanding can perpetuate harmful behaviours under the belief that online insults cause less pain than face to face aggression.

5.2.1.2 Anger and low self-esteem.

Another reoccurring theme was the close link between anger, low self-esteem, and engagement to cyberbullying. Participants described experiences of being ridiculed or humiliated, which triggered feelings of inadequacy and subsequent aggression. Adolescents are more likely to be consumed by anger to the point where they are unaware that they are harming others since anger and low self-esteem are closely related, and do not always manifest on the outside, and are frequently utilised as a protective barrier.

- Perpetrator participant 1: *"Yes, I have there is this girl at school, she was talking about the colour of my skin and the size my nose she went as far as screenshotting my pictures and send it to some of her friends just to make fun of my skin colour, and that made me very angry",*
- Perpetrator participant 2: *"Someone in class took a picture of me and posted it online and put a picture of an elephant next to it and compared me to an elephant and that made me feel sad because I am big, and they always say that in class, and that caused me to have a low self-esteem I am not happy about myself".*
- Perpetrator participant 3: *"Yes, I have shared some not so good content to embarrass someone, I really have no reasons for doing so I just wanted to hurt her like how I have been hurt, after being bullied I learned to be mean to other children as well because I realised that being nice get you ran over for no reason".*

These narratives confirm that cyberbullying is sometimes a defensive response to feelings of humiliation and low self-worth. Consistent with Bandura's social learning theory, participants internalised, observed or experienced aggression and reproduced it as a means of regaining

control and power. Anger, in this sense functioned as both a motivator and a mask for vulnerability.

5. 2. 1.3. Driven by revenge.

Revenge was identified as another strong driver of perpetration. Participants reported retaliating against perceived injustices, suggesting that cyberbullying was often motivated by a desire to punish others rather than initiate conflict:

- Perpetrator participant 1: *“Sometimes you don’t think and also having a history of being a victim of cyberbullying myself it kinda made me an angry child and wanted to get back at them only” that I didn’t know them, so I took my anger out on anyone because I wanted to feel better about myself”.*
- Perpetrator participant 2: *“I have never posted someone online not one person, but have commented on some else’s post, when someone is posted and I have gossiped about other people, I gossip about people I don’t like, because they also say mean things about me or she says about me, so I pay revenge”.*
- Perpetrator participant 3: *“I was not born a bully.” “I became one because of circumstances.”*

These findings support Moise’s (2022) assertion that retaliation often arises from real or perceived injustices. Adolescents may feel humiliated, hurt, or embarrassed, and respond by attempting to inflict the same pain on others. Revenge, therefore, provides them with a sense of control and empowerment, all at the cost of perpetuating cycle of harm. This means that there are circumstances surrounding one becoming a perpetrator, and those circumstances are rooted in social conditioning. Additionally, this participants’ response supports Bandura's social learning theory, which holds that bullying and cyberbullying are learnt behaviours. Objective four which is to examine predominant factors influencing cyberbullying was answered by this theme, participants stated that they were driven by revenge.

5.2.1.4. Self-defence.

Some perpetrators reported that they engaged in cyberbullying as a form of self-defence, framing their actions as protective rather than aggressive.

- Perpetrator participant 3: *“So I became a bully because I was bullied, and I was trying to defend myself”. I am aware but... it’s a jungle out there, if you don’t fight for yourself nobody will... I don’t just go around creating trouble... or posting people and all that... but if the need to defend myself arise then I don’t miss the opportunity to do that”.*

These themes suggest that adolescents may rationalise harmful behaviours as necessary for survival in hostile peer environments. The defensive framing blurs the line between victimhood and perpetration, reinforcing the complexity of cyberbullying dynamics. Objective four was answered by the participants which was to assess the perpetrators awareness of their bullying behaviour.

5.2.1.5 Victims of peer bullying.

Participants, revealed that their experiences of being bullied both offline and online, directly contributed to their engagement in cyberbullying.

- Perpetrator participant 2: *“Yes, I have been bullied before. By other children in the school, in my class I experienced physical, mental and cyberbullying too”.*
- Perpetrator participant 3: *“Yes, I have been bullied, by other children at school, I was also bullied by my siblings at home, it all started in primary school till high school for me mostly it was more physical bullying in primary and partly in high school, then it was cyberbullying that happened in high school”.*

This supports findings by Jankowiak’s (2024), who reported that individuals who experience bullying themselves are more likely to become perpetrators. It also echoes Bandura’s (1976) Social learning theory, which emphasises that behaviours are often learned through observation and imitating others.

5.2.1.6 Victims of sexual and domestic violence.

Participants revealed that experiences of sexual trauma and domestic violence heightened their vulnerability to cyberbullying. Cyberbullying was described as equally demanding to

mental health, just as sexual violence, with consequences like, suicidal ideation, post-traumatic stress, social withdrawal, anger, and feelings of humiliation. One participant reflected

- *“And also, being a victim of sexual violence, I became vulnerable”*. (Perpetrator participant 1).
- *“Mmhh... I also think being a victim of sexual abuse and growing up in a home where domestic violence was a norm that also has a hand in a person I am”*. (Perpetrator participant 3).

These findings align with Broll and Reynolds (2021), who found that childhood experiences of violence, particularly in a violent marked by domestic conflict, are significant predictor of bullying behaviour. Additionally, the perpetration of cyberbullying is similarly linked to negligent parenting. The present study similarly suggests that adolescents with a history of victimization are more likely to become perpetrators of cyberbullying, further highlighting the cycle of violence.

The goal of the study was to outline how adolescent girls perceive cyberbullying in the school setting, what the main causes of bullying, how cyberbullying affects teenage girls socially and psychologically, and whether the bullies are aware of their actions. The study also found that the likelihood of being a perpetrator of cyberbullying is strongly correlated with revenge, personal experiences of violence, either sexual or domestic, indicating that adolescents who bully others have either experienced sexual or domestic violence. Additionally, childhood victimisation of bullying and cyberbullying is a significant risk factor for becoming a perpetrator of cyberbullying. The results show that the adolescents in question truly do not fully understand what cyberbullying is, as a researcher I think cyberbullying is a psych thing.

5.2.2. Themes from victims’ account.

The overall findings of Part 2 of the study, which focusses on victims of cyberbullying, was to investigate their experiences; the results presented here support existing knowledge regarding this problem. Through my own research process, I was able to duplicate the existing knowledge, I did not provide any new knowledge. An analysis of the research on

cyberbullying victims can be found below. Thematic analysis of victims' transcripts revealed the following recurrent themes:

- Fear of being judged by others and becoming a victim again- Most of the victims reported being afraid of being re-victimised.
- Difficulties in building trust- Most admitted having an inability to trust their peers.
- A decline in self-esteem and self-worth- Most of the victims admitted having a low self-esteem.
- Lack of safety/security in school- All victims reported not feeling safe at school after being cyberbullied.
- Disruption in academic performance- The victims mentioned a decline in their academic progress.
- Suicidal ideation- A deeper theme that emerged was suicide, some victims attempted suicide.
- Having a psychological impact- Most victims admitted to experiencing difficulties psychologically due to being cyberbullied.
- Anger and sadness- Most reported feelings of anger and sadness.
- Exclusion from society- Most victims reported feelings of exclusion among their peers.
- Socio-economic status- Some reported that they were bullied because of their socio-economic statuses.

5.2.2.1 Fear of being judged by others and becoming a victim again.

Victims consistently expressed of being judged or re-targeted if they reported cyberbullying. This silence often stemmed from the belief that speaking up would worsen their situation or that adult will not intervene effectively.

- *“Yooo, I feel very sorry for the person on the receiving end because I know what is like to be on that side, and don’t do anything I ignore, because I’m afraid that if I do something I might get bullied as well”.* (Victim participant 7)
- *“As a human being, I honestly ignore because I feel like it has nothing to do with me, but I still do it even though knowing that it’s wrong, but we should change the way that we act towards certain situations affecting bullying because it really does*

damage the mental health and the mindset, and the self-esteem of a person that is being bullied, and we know that we can stop it but we choose to give it a blind eye".
(Victim participant 5).

These accounts support Mwansa's (2023) findings that victims remain silence to avoid embarrassment and further harm. The anonymity of cyberbullying, as noted by (Pyzalski, 2020), exacerbates this fear by shielding perpetrators while living victims exposed from cyberbullying. which is why participants victims of the study chose passivity instead of reporting.

- *"I was very scared that maybe parents will think that all the things that are written about me in the channels they were true. Yes, I was very scared of that". I didn't care, but it didn't matter to me what other people are thinking, but what mattered to me was at home what they were going to say, what they were going to think maybe they were going to think that all those things written about me in the channels were true".*
(Victim participant 6):

Victim participant 6: Her fear seemed different from other participants, among other things, her biggest fear was what her parents would think of her, will they believe all the lies written about her. She didn't care what other people thought of her; she was more worried about what they would say and how they would see her afterwards.

5.2.2.2 Difficulties in building trust.

Cyberbullying also disrupted participants' ability to trust others. Many described feeling betrayed by close friends who had joined the rest of the crew and reposted harmful content. The participants answered objective two which is to explore the social effects of cyberbullying by stating that they have difficulty in making friends.

- *"I lost my trust in people Arhmm... with human beings there is a thing of you can't easily trust them because they will easily break it. I'm not a very trusting person".*
(Victim participant 2.)
- *"No, not anymore and I don't trust a lot of people now, since the cyberbullying thing happened. Coz, you see when the channel started some of the people who were close*

to me, they were posting and re-posting that, so I didn't understand what was happening or maybe they were happy about it". (Victim participant 6).

Such difficulties in forming trusting relationships reflect long-term psychological scars, undermining peer connections and reinforcing isolation.

5.2.2.3 Decline in self-worth and self-esteem.

Victims reported a significant decline in self-esteem and self-worth, often internalising negative stereotypes and criticism.

- *"it messed with my mental health in a sense of you lose self-esteem and you lose self-worth, and it turns to affect the mind as a results you feel like you don't have enough, Arhmm, okay you not enough to satisfy the needs of the people around you and you turn to have a more clingy nature and you turn to want to please other people". (Victim participant 2).*

These findings align with Holfeld and Mishna (2019, p. 567), who emphasised that adolescents' self-esteem is especially fragile during identity formation and is frequently harmed by cyberbullying. It's a stage where they are trying to form relationships/friendships, now when they have low self-esteem, they might struggle to make friends due to thinking that they might get rejected.

5.2.2.4 Lack of safety and security in school.

Cyberbullying contributed to feelings of insecurity within school settings. Several participants reported feeling unsafe due to humiliation and the uncertainty of not knowing who was behind the acts.

- *"What I went through was an act of being stripped of your voice and your rights to stand up for yourself"... "If safe at school and that would be because I am strong willed, so I don't even think a person will get a chance to even think about bullying me right now and I experienced bullying in school the most. So, I don't feel safe, I put up my defence mechanism". (Victim Participant 1).*

- “*School is a very toxic environment... you can’t be yourself due to the fear of being judged*” (Victim Participant 2).

These findings support Stonard’s (2020) conclusion that the anonymity of cyberbullying intensifies victim humiliation and increases feelings of vulnerability. Their fear is also exacerbated by the fact that they are unaware of what their peers are saying about them in private. When the matter is reported to the teachers, they have two options: they suspend the perpetrator and contact the parents. If the perpetrator attends the same school as the victim, it can be extremely upsetting for the victim and increase the likelihood that they will become a victim again. Cyberbullying victims may feel like they are being singled out constantly, which can cause them great psychological pain and make coping difficult.

5.2.2.5 Disruption in academic performance.

Academic performance was also negatively impacted. Participants reported difficulties concentrating, disengagement from schoolwork, and declining grades.

- “*...it deteriorated in a sense where my academics dropped*” (Victim Participant 2).

This finding echoes Farhangpour, Maluleke, and Mutshaeni (2019), who documented the detrimental intellectual and emotional effects of cyberbullying on students. The permanence of digital footprints further exacerbated these effects, as harmful content remained accessible long after incidents occurred (Gopal, 2021).

These occurrences had a detrimental emotional and intellectual impact on these learners. Because victims of bullying lose attention, become disengaged from their academic obligations, and experience depression, poor academic accomplishment is a potential consequence of bullying, not only just as academics but their whole lives had changed. *Cyberbullying is more lethal because digital footprint is real*, meaning once things are posted on certain social media platforms, they stay there for a very long time even after they are deleted, which means that its more permanent display of lies which means that anyone’s life could be changed in one second through a press of a button.

5.2.2.6. Suicidal ideation.

Due to bullying and cyberbullying, the suicide rate among teenagers is quite high. Alarming, more than half of participants reported experiencing suicidal thoughts or attempts following cyberbullying.

- *“I was more suicidal than usual... the thought of it has gone through my mind a million times over the past two years”* (Victim Participant 2).
- *“Yes, I have... I attempted to take my life because the things that were written about me were painful”* (Victim Participant 7).

These results are consistent with Pepurah (2023), who found a strong correlation between victimisation through cyberbullying and adolescent suicide risk.

5.2.2.7 Having psychological impact.

All participants reported psychological distress, particularly depression, anxiety, and feelings of helplessness. Objective two which is to explore the social and the psychological impact of cyberbullying among adolescent was answered by the participants.

- *“Basically, it all messes with everyone’s mental health... I became more of a nonchalant individual”* (Victim Participant 2).
- *“Mmh... yooo, a lot after the incident my life was never the same it broke me, my self-esteem went down, now I’m scared to even do simple task, when I am supposed to do a speech in class I will worry about how I look, mentally it finished me.”* (Victim participant 7).

These findings align with Calmaestra (2020), who highlighted the negative psychological outcomes of cyberbullying on self-esteem, emotional well-being, and body image.

The participants felt like they cannot escape cyberbullying since it follows them wherever they go, and these findings matches those of Patchin and Hinduja (2010), and Jankowiak (2024). Since there is a digital footprint involved and the digital footprint left by cyberbullying is harmful and can have long-lasting effects, as the content may remain online for the victim's entire life, affecting their future social and professional life and the victims

may feel as though they are unable to leave, which can exacerbate feelings of helplessness and hopelessness.

5.2.2.8 Anger and sadness.

Participants described feeling anger and sadness as natural responses to the violation of being cyberbullied.

- *“In terms of anger, sadness, there was a phase where I had all that”* (Victim Participant 2).
- *“I was just sad... coz I was thinking that maybe it's one of my friends who did this”* (Victim Participant 6).

This corresponds with Patchin and Hinduja's (2017) findings that victims of cyberbullying are at heightened risk of experiencing negative emotions such as anger, embarrassment, sadness, and fear.

5.2.2.9 Social Exclusion.

Many participants reported social withdrawal and difficulty maintaining friendships. They avoided social activities due to mistrust and fear of further victimisation.

- *“I isolate myself so much... I don't befriend other people easily because I feel like they gonna do the same thing”* (Victim Participant 3).
- *“I can't make friends because I don't trust anyone... today a person is your friend but tomorrow they are not”* (Victim Participant 7).

These accounts confirm findings by Tanrinkuu (2019) and Rodriguez & Hidalgo (2020), who associated cyber-victimisation with loneliness, rejection, and peer distancing.

5.2.2.10 Socio-economic status.

Finally, socio-economic differences also emerged as factors in victimisation. Some were bullied for being wealthy, while others for being poor or different in appearance.

- *“I was bullied just because my dad is rich and because of the way I look”* (Victim Participant 4).

- *“It can be both... some get jealous of how others improve academically, and some make fun of those who live in poverty”* (Victim Participant 3).

This reflects Shaaban’s (2022) conclusion that socio-economic status influences the dynamics of bullying, often fuelling envy or ridicule. Additionally, because cyberbullying is characterised by anonymity, it is easier for those who engage in it to target others, and not be held accountable (Huston, 2018), he further notes that this type of bullying illuminates the potential inherent traits of bullying because it involves less face-to-face interaction and less accountability. Additionally, cyberbullying is more deadly, it should be treated severely. I believe this to be more impactful because it is more harmful to the individual and most people don't take it well.

Perceptions of counselling.

when asked about counselling, most participants expressed scepticism, believing it would not change their experiences or erase the public humiliation they endured. Others feared stigma or preferred to cope privately.

- *“My grandfather made me understand it wasn’t a me thing, it was as a them thing”* (Victim participant 1).
- *“Going to counselling might even make things worse for me”* (Victim participant 6).

This scepticism underscores the need for more responsive, empathetic, and effective support systems within schools.

5.3. Discussion of findings.

The purpose of this study was to explore the social and psychological effects of cyberbullying among adolescent girls, considering both victims and perpetrators. The findings reveal that cyberbullying affects adolescents’ mental health, social interactions, and academic performance, while perpetrators’ motivation stem from personal vulnerabilities and prior exposure to violence. Most of the present data came from participants' general responses after they had directly engaged in cyberbullying or been victims in a school setting. It is recognised that these results might not accurately reflect the complex experiences of both

perpetrators and victims of cyberbullying. Nonetheless, they will shed a light on adolescent females' experiences with cyberbullying.

According to other research studies, bullying and cyberbullying is prevalent among adolescents and have serious negative consequences for both the victims and perpetrators. There is substantial evidence that experiences of cyberbullying are associated with the emergence of emotional, social, and behavioural issues (Loch et al., 2020). Even with the extensive research on cyberbullying behaviours, much about the phenomenon is still unknown. The study's findings show that cyberbullying is still prevalent and has an impact on teenagers in the school.

5.3.1. Understanding of cyberbullying.

The study found that adolescent girls are generally aware of what cyberbullying is, however, they do not fully comprehend its implications or the extent of harm it causes. Perpetrators often described their actions as a form of retaliation or self-defence, while underestimating the emotional and social consequences for the victims. For example, victim participant 5 noted:

- *“I think the reason why most bullies out there bullying people is to heal or to make themselves feel better about themselves, because of probably insecurities, so they portray it on another person”.*

This aligns with existing literature showing that unresolved trauma, low self-esteem, and prior victimisation can drive individuals to bully others (Tosuntus et al., 2020; Moise, 2022). Social learning theory also supports this, by suggesting that adolescents exposed to violence at home or school environment may replicate such behaviour online (Juan et al., 2018).

5.3.2. Psychological Effects.

Victims reported a wide range of psychological impacts, including:

- Low self-esteem and self-worth.
- Anxiety, depression, and emotional instability.
- Suicidal thoughts or attempts.

- Anger, frustration, and sadness.

For instance, victim participant 2 explained:

- *“I was more suicidal than usual, I felt as if everything and everyone around me was not enough to keep me grounded”.*

These findings corroborate studies by Chikwuere et al. (2021) and Farhangpour et al. (2019), which highlighted the strong link between cyberbullying and psychosocial distress. Victims often experience long-term consequences such as social withdrawal, impaired relationships, and persistent mental health challenges (Mutshaeni, 2019; Dennehy et al., 2020).

5.3.3. Social Effects.

Cyberbullying also had significant social repercussions. Victims reported:

- Isolation and withdrawal from peers.
- Difficulties building trust.
- Fear of being judged or re-victimised.
- Negative impact on classroom engagement and school participation.

Victim participant 7 stated:

- *“Yooo, socially I can’t make friends because I don’t trust anyone...you never know, today a person is your friend but tomorrow they are not.”*

These social outcomes align with previous studies indicating that cybervictimisation leads to loneliness, social anxiety, and distancing from peers (Tanrinkulu, 2019; Ghansah, 2022). Fear of retaliation, anonymity of perpetrators, and uncertainty about who is behind the bullying exacerbate victims’ feelings of vulnerability.

5.3.4. Academic Impact.

The study showed that cyberbullying negatively affected academic performance. Victims reported declining focus, absenteeism, and disengagement from school activities due to fear, anxiety, and emotional distress. Victim participant 2 explain:

- *“Arhmm...it deteriorated in a sense where my academics dropped.”*

These findings support Farhangpour, Maluleke, and Mutshaeni (2019), who identified academic deterioration as a common consequence of cybervictimisation. Digital permanence, or the enduring long after the initial incident (Gopal, 2021).

5.3.5. Motivation behind cyberbullying.

Perpetrators reported multiple motivations, including revenge, low self-esteem, self-defence, and prior victimization. Many had themselves experienced traditional bullying, domestic violence, or sexual abuse. For example, perpetrator participant 3 stated:

- *“I also think being a victim of sexual abuse and growing up in a home where domestic violence was a norm...has a hand in a person I am.”*

This reflects a cynical nature of bullying, where victimisation increases the likelihood of becoming a perpetrator (Broll & Reynolds, 2021; Piccoli et al., 2020). Perpetrators lack of awareness about the severity of their actions demonstrates the psychological mechanisms of moral disengagement and the disinhibition effect online.

5.3.6. Role of socioeconomic and Demographic Factors.

Participants highlighted the influence of socioeconomic status, physical appearance, and ethnicity in cyberbullying dynamics. For instance, victim participant 4 noted:

- *“I was bullied just because my dad is rich and because of the way I look...”*

This aligns with previous studies showing that perceived social inequality and jealousy often motivate bullying behaviours (Shaaban, 2022; Malecki et al., 2020).

5.3.7. Coping and Resilience.

Victims’ coping mechanisms varied. Some sought family support, which reduced suicidal ideation and strengthened resilience. For example, victim participant 5 explained:

- *“I didn’t attempt suicide because I know that I am not of South African origin, so I am used to being treated differently.”*

Positive parent-child relationships and higher resilience were found to buffer the negative impact of cyberbullying, constant with Elsaesser et al. (2017).

5.3.8. Bystander Behaviour.

The study also highlighted the role of cyber bystanders. Many reported inactions due to fear of retaliation, lack of confidence, or perceived irrelevance. Some stepped in to support younger victims. Aligning with Alipan (2020), who notes that bystanders’ intervention depends on perceived responsibility and personal investment.

The study answered all the research objectives by revealing that these teenagers are aware of what cyberbullying is, but they do not fully understand or comprehend it; the psychological effects include suicide, and the social effects include anxiety, fear, despair, shame and isolation; they isolate themselves because they do not know who to trust, and the main reasons they bully is low self-esteem, revenge, being victims of other violence, and self-defence. When their awareness of cyberbullying was tested, it was discovered that for the perpetrators the intent to cause harm was there, but they were unaware that they were engaging in cyberbullying to them it was all about revenge, but just unaware of the harm they are causing to others.

There is little doubt that the severity of the different instances of cyberbullying affects a person both immediately and overtime. According to Smith, Bauman, and Wong (2019:1), bullying can have negative long-term and short-term effects on all parties involved, supporting the aforementioned findings. Some people want to end their lives, and there are serious consequences like excessive trauma, despair, and social anxiety. According to UNICEF 2021 research findings, victims of cyberbullying may experience three effects. The victims of cyberbullying may become emotionally disinterested in something. At first, victims may act regularly, joyfully, and contentedly, but they may later become sensitive and cranky.

Victim participant 1: reported that *“from being soft and bubble I became angry, I used to get kicked out of class from time-to-time coz I would be rude, and backchat because in my head I was protecting myself at any cost”*, and cyberbullying can physically make the victim overthink the problem at hand.

According to all victim participants, experiencing cyberbullying had an impact on their mental health; they reported feeling depressed and experiencing anxiety related to school. These findings are consistent with those of (Tian et al., 2018), who found that cyber-victimization has been linked to poor mental health (Kim et al., 2020).

The study discovered a link between cyberbullying and other forms of violence. The findings are like that of (Juan, Zuze, Hannan, Govender & Reddy, 2018:1), they strongly associate bullying in South African schools with all types of violence including cyberbullying, shooting etc. The participants of the study stated that they had previously experienced domestic and sexual abuse, both of which are contributing factors to cyberbullying. For instance, if a child grows up in a household where parents are constantly fighting, she may come to believe that such behaviour is acceptable. According to social learning theory, teenagers are more likely to engage in cyberbullying because they are prone to copy their parents' behaviour viewing violence as means to solve problems, which increases the likelihood of them engaging in cyberbullying.

5.3.9. Conclusion.

The interviews conducted with the study participants; the results were presented in this chapter. Upon evaluating the interview data, several themes from both the cyberbullying victims and perpetrators surfaced, e.g., Insufficient comprehension of the phenomenon, Retaliation-driven, low self-esteem, feelings of exclusion or insecurity, self-defence, etc. Overall, the study found that cyberbullying has pervasive social, psychological, and academic consequences for adolescent girls. Victims experience low self-esteem, social withdrawal, depression, and suicidal ideation. While perpetrators are often motivated by prior trauma, low self-confidence, and revenge. Cyberbullying is facilitated by technology, anonymity, and digital permanence, and the interaction between perpetrators, victims, and bystanders shapes the overall impact of the phenomenon.

In addition to being a significant and current issue, cyberbullying is also becoming a bigger worry because of how rapidly the phenomena has grown as technology has advanced. Unintentionally, the growth of information and communication technology and easier access to the Internet has led to an increase in cyberbullying, particularly among teenagers.

CHAPTER 6 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION.

6.1 Introduction.

Chapter six sought to give conclusion of the findings of the study. From the introduction of the first chapter to the last. This is of importance as it gives a clear indication of the key focus of what the project aimed to achieve and what critical questions it sought and attempted to answer.

6.2 Conclusion.

The first chapter introduced the topic and put it into context. This is vital as it gives a clear indication of the key focus of what the project aimed to achieve and what critical questions it sought and attempted to answer. The second chapter then sought to explore current literature that speaks of the social and psychological effects of cyberbullying this chapter mostly looks at what other scholars have previously done to justify the need of this study and identify gaps in the literature. Some literature studied the psychosocial effects of social media in African countries, found that cyberbullying had educational implications. These studies revealed that learners were missing classes, quitting school, and disliking interactions with other learners because they had been bullied on social networks.

Lack of self-control, social anxiety, aggressive ideas, low social intelligence, and moral breakdown are additional individual risk factors for adolescents who have been cyber-victims. Cyberbullying and inappropriate social media use have been linked in recent studies (Kircaburun et al., 2019). Additionally, (Kircaburun et al., 2020) found that those who engage in cyberbullying score lower on self-esteem and higher on dissociative experiences, depression, childhood emotional trauma, Cluster B personality traits (narcissistic, histrionic, anti-social, and borderline), problematic social media use, and dissociative experiences. Adolescents who have experienced victimisation may exhibit impulsive, angry, and aggressive behaviours in response to perceived provocation (Sullivan et al., 2021). The third chapter theorized the problem at hand allowing or paving the way into the next chapter which showed which methods worked best in exploring the query at hand. And lastly, the fifth chapter analysed the data gathered. The data finding was first presented, secondly, major themes found in data were discussed and lastly data analysed and followed by the conclusion of data findings.

This study sought to explore the effects of social and psychological effects of cyberbullying among high school girls. The findings from the perpetrators point of view presented the need for revenge, self- defence, anger and low self-esteem as the major motive for perpetrators to victimize other learners. Most learners shared that they didn't make much of posting their fellow learners, they didn't anticipate the harm. Other motives of cyberbullying include the differences among learners. jealous and exposure to violent sexual violence and domestic violence.

The results proved that learners are affected psychologically, physically and socially by cyberbullying. The psychological effects included suicidal thoughts or attempt to suicide, low self-esteem, anger emotional instability, anxiety, mental health issues, and loneliness whereas the social effects included hating school, lack of trust, poor social image, not so good relationships with family and friends especially in a school environment, and the fact that the perpetrator is not known to the victim the participants describe that as a worse effect, because due to the anonymity provided by the Internet, the phenomenon of cyberbullying can multiply, as cyberbullies frequently use false identities. The phenomenon of cyberbullying could undergo some changes, which appear because of the continuous development of information and communications technology. Cyberbullies are constantly adapting their ways of operating to the constant changes in information and communications technology.

The study sought to answer the research questions, and the findings state that these adolescents' perpetrators do not fully understand what cyberbullying is judging from their responses, the victim participants stated the social and psychological effects of being subjected to bullying or of being a victim of cyberbullying. The underlying factors have that influence adolescents to engage in bullying, and the study found that the adolescents who engage in cyberbullying do not realize the seriousness their actions have on the people who are on the receiving end. Now that we know the findings of the study However, parents should also play an important role in making sure that teenagers use their phones responsibly, since they are responsible for buying smartphones for their children, since the ownership of smartphones among teenagers has increased access of online communication, and that has increased the risk of cyberbullying among adolescents and parents should be actively monitoring how children use their devices and with whom, and teachers should also play a role by identifying cyberbullying incidents early for early interventions.

The identity people adopt when discussing their experiences related to cyberbullying is flexible, and cyberbullying is a complicated topic. This is because, after being targeted online, most participants decided to defend themselves by engaging in cyberbullying. People can adopt new identities and roles in the digital age. As a result, the context of cyberbullying determines whether a person is considered a bully or not. Social media offers a "screen" to "hide" behind (stay anonymous), there are fewer repercussions, and it is just a simpler way to bully, which is why cyberbullies were inspired to bully online. It is evident that the disinhibition effect could account for the online activity of cyberbullies, and moral disengagement enables them to defend their acts. The social learning theory was evidently useful in determining the elements that affect bullying and cyberbullying.

Numerous methods and chances for cyberbullying have been made possible by technology. Because cyberbullies have constant access to their cell phones and may take their time coming up with insults, since they engage in cyberbullying using social media platforms to target their victims. Platforms like, Instagram, WhatsApp channels, snapchat, and TikTok, where they are able create fake accounts and post hurtful comments, sharing and reposting etc. because these platforms give them an option to reach a huge audience, bullying has grown simpler online. Because they can stay anonymous and avoid social rejection or condemnation, bullies are even more motivated. This conduct causes a loss of mentalisation and permits the cyberbully to carry on with their "dehumanising" actions. Because kids can "hide" behind the screen and avoid being hit or in trouble, they also face less penalties. Finally, the role of the cyber bystander seems to be almost non-existent. They are perceived as being weak and defenceless.

Cyber bystanders are more inclined to join the cyberbully because of the anonymity, ease, and lack of penalties associated with cyberbullying. Some online onlookers might be persuaded to join the cyberbully in addition to the alluring aspects of cyberbullying. A dysfunctional family environment or retaliation are two examples of motivational factors, because dysfunctional families are characterised by abuse, broken relationships between family members including children, lack of communication, neglect and so forth, it's an environment where children are not given safe space to safely express their emotions, especially South African families. As a result, they could become irritated and angry, and cyberbullying becomes a convenient way for them to vent their emotions and feel satisfied,

even though each participant had a unique experience and perspective on cyberbullying, their observations or experiences led to similar opinions.

Cyberbullying is a phenomenon that makes victims of cyberbullying fearful. Upon the themes that have emerged during the interviews with victim participants, they shared that since the incident they isolate themselves, they do not feel safe at school, fear of being judged and re-victimised. Other scholars state that cybervictimization have been shown to have detrimental short- and long-term effects on people's academic, social, emotional, and cognitive development. Negative feelings like grief, anger, disappointment, embarrassment, and fear are brought on by cyberbullying (Hinduja and Patchin 2017).

6.3. Recommendations.

- Future researchers in this field should think about using qualitative research and interview questions because qualitative research is a naturalistic inquiry process that aims to gain a thorough understanding of social phenomena in a natural setting. They should also think about involving human subjects as participants and involving them when trying to find solutions.
- Future research needs normalise examining this phenomenon from the viewpoint of the perpetrators, more qualitative studies that involve human perpetrators. Parents, kids, schools, and society at large should work together to combat cyberbullying. Because cyberbullying occurs outside of school limits, instructors and parents must keep an eye on their students' online actions both at school and at home. High school learners need to be taught safe and healthy communication and safety technology usage and practices, such as avoiding posting personal information online.
- Future research should consider investigating this phenomenon using participatory research. Participatory research as a methodology that uses a systematic inquiry in direct collaboration with those affected by the issue that is being studied for the purpose of action. Involving the participants from the problem identification will help us in coming up with better solutions.
- Other researchers need to investigate the long-term effects of being a victim of cyberbullying. It would be crucial to ascertain whether the trauma endured is comparatively brief (a few months) or if it lasts for a long time (for example, several studies have demonstrated that the impacts of cyberbullying at school continue far into adulthood).

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24 July 2025

Nomusa Noluthando Nkosi (224166271)
School of Social Sciences
Howard College Campus

Dear NN Nkosi,

Protocol reference number: HSSREC/00008776/2025

Project title: Investigating the social and psychological effects of cyberbullying among adolescent girls. A case study of an all-girls high school in Durban KwaZulu Natal.

Degree: Masters

Approval Notification – Full Committee Reviewed Protocol

This letter serves to notify you that your response received on 21 July 2025 to our letter of 26 June 2025 in connection with the above, was reviewed by the Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (HSSREC) and the protocol has been granted **FULL APPROVAL**.

Any alteration/s to the approved research protocol i.e. Questionnaire/Interview Schedule, Informed Consent Form, Title of the Project, Location of the Study, Research Approach and Methods must be reviewed and approved through the amendment/modification prior to its implementation. In case you have further queries, please quote the above reference number.

PLEASE NOTE: Research data should be securely stored in the discipline/department for a period of 5 years.

Incidents of adverse events and serious adverse events (AEs and SAEs) should be reported in writing to HSSREC, the study sponsors, and any regulatory authority (where appropriate), within 7 working days of the occurrence for local sites and 14 days for all other South African sites.

This approval is valid for one year until 24 July 2026

To ensure uninterrupted approval of this study beyond the approval expiry date, a progress report must be submitted to the Research Office on the appropriate form 2 - 3 months before the expiry date. A close-out report to be submitted when study is finished.

HSSREC is registered with the South African National Health Research Ethics Council (REC-040414-040).

Yours faithfully



Doctor Shamila Naidoo (Interim Chair) /nng

Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee
UKZN Research Ethics Office Westville Campus, Govan Mbeki Building
Postal Address: Private Bag X54001, Durban 4000
Tel: +27 31 260 8350 / 4557 / 3587
Website: <http://research.ukzn.ac.za/Research-Ethics/>



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Prof Londiwe Jali.

Department of Sociology

University of Kwazulu Natal

232 Mazisi Kunene Avenue

Howard College

4041.

Dear Miss Jali

Subject: Community Research permission for Miss Nkosi, Student number: (224166271)

As Deputy Principal of Mowat Park High School, I confirm that Miss Nkosi as a registered masters candidate under your Supervision has been granted permission to conduct her study within our school under the following proviso:

1. Ms Nkosi obtains permission from all learners and their parents prior to undertaking the research.
2. Information collected during the course of the research remains confidential and learner privacy is maintained.
3. The school name is not used in the final dissertation.

We understand that the research will focus on Cyberbullying bullying and its long term effects socially and psychologically amongst Adolescents girls. We recognize that the study aims to explore adolescent girls' understanding of cyber bullying within the school environment. Furthermore we understand the research will identify the predominant factors influencing decisions behind bullying and more importantly Ms Nkosi's research will help raise awareness about bullying.

Thank you for supervising such an impactful and beneficial research study that will assist in addressing one of the main issues affecting schools today.

S. Herd (Mrs)
(Deputy Principal)



KWAZULU-NATAL PROVINCE

EDUCATION
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

OFFICE OF THE HEAD OF DEPARTMENT

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Anton Lembede Building, 247 Burger Street, Pietermaritzburg, 3201

Enquiries : Ms Phindile Duma

Email : research@kzndoe.gov.za

Ref: 2/4/8/825

Tel : 033 392 1063/ 031 360 6539

Ms NN Nkosi

Durban
4066

BY EMAIL: 224166271@stu.ukzn.ac.za

Dear Ms Nkosi

PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN THE KZN DOE INSTITUTIONS

Your application to conduct research entitled: **“INVESTIGATING THE SOCIAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL EFFECTS OF CYBERBULLYING AMONG ADOLESCENT GIRLS: A CASE STUDY OF AN ALL-GIRLS HIGH SCHOOL IN DURBAN”** in the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education Institutions has been approved. The conditions of the approval are as follows:

1. The researcher will make all the arrangements concerning the research and interviews.
2. The researcher must ensure that Educator and learning programmes are not interrupted.
3. Interviews are not conducted during the time of writing examinations in schools.
4. Learners, Educators, Schools and Institutions are not identifiable in any way from the results of the research.
5. A copy of this letter is submitted to District Managers, Principals and Heads of Institutions where the Intended research and interviews are to be conducted.
6. The period of investigation is limited to the period from 23 February 2026 to 01 January 2029.
7. Your research and interviews will be limited to the schools you have proposed and approved by the Head of Department. Please note that Principals, Educators, Departmental Officials and Learners are under no obligation to participate or assist you in your investigation.
8. Should you wish to extend the period of your survey at the school(s), please contact Miss Phindile Duma at the contact numbers above.
9. Upon completion of the research, a brief summary of the findings, recommendations or a full report/dissertation/thesis must be submitted to the research office of the Department. Please address it to The Office of the HOD, Private Bag X9137, Pietermaritzburg, 3200.
10. Please note that your research and interviews will be limited to schools and institutions in KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education.

UMLAZI DISTRICT

MR GN NGCOBO
HEAD OF DEPARTMENT
KZN EDUCATION
DATE: 24/02/2026

Social Sciences, College of Humanities,
University of KwaZulu-Natal,
Howard College Campus,

Dear Parent/Guardian

PARENTAL CONSENT LETTER

My name is **Nomusa Nkosi** (224166271) I am a Sociology Masters candidate student at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Howard College campus, South Africa. I am interested in **Investigating the social and psychological impact of cyberbullying in adolescent girls both victims and perpetrators. A case study of an all-girls high school in Durban KwaZulu Natal.**

Your child is invited to participate in this research study because they are an adolescent attending Mowat park high between the ages 15-18 years. I am writing to you to request permission that you allow her to take part in the study with a title above. If you give permission for your child to participate in the study, you will be asked to sign this form. If you cannot sign your name, you can make a mark while someone else is watching. This study seeks to engage adolescents attending Mowat park to help explore their experiences on social and psychological effects of cyberbullying. A research study is a way to learn more about something. In this study, I will ask a set of questions to adolescents relating to cyberbullying.

Please note that: The research aims at knowing your child's view on cyberbullying, her involvement is purely for academic purposes only, no information will be used against her and there are no financial benefits involved. Your child's participation in the study is voluntary, she has a right to withdraw anytime and may stop the interview at any time and decide to leave the study if they wish without any consequences. The study participants will engage in interviews which will be 1 hour long. These discussions will cover topics related to cyberbullying among adolescents. There will be recordings of the interviews to make sure that information is not lost. This will be through audio recording or through taking notes.

This form contains information you need to know. It will give you important information about participation in this study. You have the right to take your time before making decisions about your child's participating in this study. If you have questions about this study or part of this form, you can ask me at any time on the details below. If you decide that your child can take part in this study, you will be asked to sign this form. You will be given a copy of the signed form to keep.

Risks and/or discomforts

Some of the questions I ask your child might make them feel uncomfortable. They will be free to choose not to answer any question that makes them feel uncomfortable, without facing any consequences since the study is voluntary, she has a right to withdraw when she wishes

to. Your child's answers to all questions will be kept confidential. However, if I find that they are at risk of harm, I may share this information with a relevant people professional or refer them to a health professional to ensure that they get the help they need.

Confidentiality

The researcher is committed to safeguarding your child's information and ensuring its confidentiality. Unless specific interventions are required based on the collected information, and there is an option for further psychological help if required in terms of counselling. Your child's data will be kept strictly confidential. Their name will not be included on any research forms or reports; instead, they will be assigned a unique study participant name.

Once interviews are concluded, all questions and information will no longer be accessible. Recordings will be transcribed and securely stored on a password-protected computer. Additionally, a separate list linking their name to the study number will be securely locked in a separate cabinet, with electronic copies stored in a password-protected file

I can be contacted at:

Email: 224166271@stu.ukzn.ac.za

Phone number: [REDACTED]

My supervisor is Ms. Londiwe Jali who is located at the Sociology Department, Howard College campus of the University of KwaZulu-Natal.

Contact details:

Email: JaliL1@ukzn.ac.za

Phone number: [REDACTED]

You may also contact the Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee's.

Contact Details:

Email: HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za

Tell: 0312604557/8350/3587

Thank you for your contribution to this research.

DECLARATION

I..... (full names of parent/ Guardian) hereby confirm that I understand the contents of this document and the nature of the research project, and I give consent for my daughter to participate in the research project.

I understand that she is at liberty to withdraw from the project at any time, should she desire.

SIGNATURE OF GUARDIAN

DATE

.....

.....

Social Sciences, College of Humanities,
University of KwaZulu-Natal,
Howard College Campus,

Dear Participant

INFORMED CONSENT LETTER

My name is **Nomusa Nkosi** (224166271) I am a Sociology Masters candidate student at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Howard College campus, South Africa. I am interested in **Investigating the social and psychological impact of cyberbullying in adolescent girls both victims and perpetrators. A case study of an all-girls high school in Durban KwaZulu Natal.**

I am writing to invite you to take part in a research study with the topic above. You are invited to participate in this research study because you are a teenager attending Mowat park high school. If you agree to participate in the study, you will be asked to sign this form. If you cannot sign your name, you can make a mark. We will also ask permission from your parent/guardian for their permission to have you be part of the study. The study participants will engage in interviews which will be 1 hour long. There will be recordings of the interview sessions to make sure that information is not lost. This may be through audio recording or through taking notes.

About this consent form

This consent form contains information about the study. It will give you important information about your participation in the study. You have the right to take your time before making decisions about participating in this study. Your participation in the study is voluntary. You may stop the interview at any time and decide to leave the study if you wish without any consequences. If you have questions about this study or part of this form, you can ask me at any time. If you decide to take part in this study, you will be asked to sign this form. You will be given a copy of the signed form to keep. In the event of any problems or concerns/questions you may contact me or contact my supervisor or even our research office on the details below either by contact or email.

Risks and/or discomforts

Some of the questions I ask may make you feel uncomfortable. You can choose to not answer any question that makes you feel uncomfortable, without facing any consequences. Your answers to all questions will be kept confidential. However, if I find you are at risk of harm, I will be ethically obliged to breach confidentiality. I may share this information with relevant people like professional social worker/ psychologist or refer you to a health professional to ensure you get the help you need, but I will discuss this with you first, but just be assured there is support available for you.

Confidentiality

The researcher is committed to safeguarding your information and ensuring its confidentiality. Unless specific interventions are required based on the collected information, there is counselling option available for you should you require, your data will be kept strictly confidential. Your name will not be included on any research forms or reports; instead, you will be assigned a unique study name.

Once interviews are concluded, all questions and information will no longer be accessible. Recordings will be transcribed and securely stored on a password-protected computer. Additionally, a separate list linking your name to the study number will be securely locked in a separate cabinet, with electronic copies stored in a password-protected file. No information about you, or information that connects you to the study, will be given to anyone without your wish.

- Your involvement is purely for academic purposes only, your information will not be used against you and there are no financial benefits involved.
- If you are willing to be interviewed, please indicate (by ticking as applicable) whether you are willing or not to allow the interview to be recorded by the following equipment:

	willing	Not willing
Audio equipment		
Photographic equipment		
Video equipment		

I can be contacted at:

Email: 224166271@stu.ukzn.ac.za

Phone number: [REDACTED]

My supervisor is Ms Londiwe Jali who is located at the Sociology Department, Howard College campus of the University of KwaZulu-Natal.

Contact details:

Email: JaliL1@ukzn.ac.za

Phone number: + [REDACTED].

You may also contact the Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee's Contact Details.

Email: HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za

Tell: 0312604557/8350/3587

Thank you for your contribution to this research.

DECLARATION

I..... (full names of participant) hereby confirm that I understand the contents of this document and the nature of the research project, and I consent to participating in the research project.

I understand that I am at liberty to withdraw from the project at any time, should I so desire.

SIGNATURE OF PARTICIPANT

DATE

.....

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Investigating the social and psychological effects of cyberbullying among adolescent girls. A case study of an all-girls high school in Durban.

Interview Questions (Victims of cyberbullying bullying)

- Please tell me about yourself, your background.
- Do you understand what cyberbullying is? Can you describe a time when you were bullied or made to feel uncomfortable online?
- How often did you experience cyberbullying is it frequently, occasionally or ongoing?
- How did the experience make you feel at the time? Did it affect your self-confidence, mental health, or behaviour at school or home?
- Can you tell me about the social media or messaging platform you often use on your phone and what you usually use them for?
- What types of content that are commonly shared that can lead to pupils becoming targets of cyberbullying?
- Did you talk to anyone (e.g., friend, parent, teacher) about it? What was their response?
- Do you think bullies target certain individuals according to their socio-economic status, or appearance or because they are excelling academically?
- Have you noticed any changes in your mental health due to being cyberbullied?
- How has cyberbullying affected your emotions, including feelings of sadness, anger, fear and hopelessness?
- How has cyberbullying affected you socially, in terms of making friends or any relations with people who are close to you?
- Have you ever thought about taking your own life because you were cyberbullied?
- If you answered yes to the previous question, have you sought counselling for help?
- Do you believe that cyberbullying should be taken seriously?
- When you come across cyberbullying online, what reactions do you typically have? How do you usually respond?
- Do you feel safe at school, Which environment have you experienced cyberbullying the most?
- What assistance does the school provide when you experience bullying?
- What measures do you think would be effective in reducing cyberbullying?

Investigating the social and psychological effects of cyberbullying among adolescent girls. A case study of an all-girls high school in Montclair area, Durban KwaZulu-Natal.

Interview Questions (Perpetrators/Offenders of Bullying)

- Please tell me about yourself, your upbringing.
- Are you familiar with a term cyberbullying? If so, how would you describe it?
- Have you ever experienced cyberbullying? If yes, can you describe what happened, who was involved, and how did it affect you?
- Have you ever witnessed someone being bullied online, how did you respond? did you also add your hate speech?
- What types of content that are commonly shared that can lead to pupils becoming targets of cyberbullying?
- Can you tell me about the social media or messaging platform you often use on your phone and what you usually use them for?
- Have you or someone you know ever shared online content that could be seen as threatening, embarrassing, or targeting another person? If so, what was the motivation behind?
- At that time, were you aware that your actions or words could be considered as cyberbullying?
- When you come across cyberbullying online, what reactions do you typically have? How do you usually respond?
- Did you think about how your actions might affect the person targeted?
- Do you think people online sometimes go too far without realizing the harm they're causing?
- How do you view cyberbullying? Do you consider it to be a serious issue?