

UNIVERSITY OF GHANA
COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES
DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL WORK

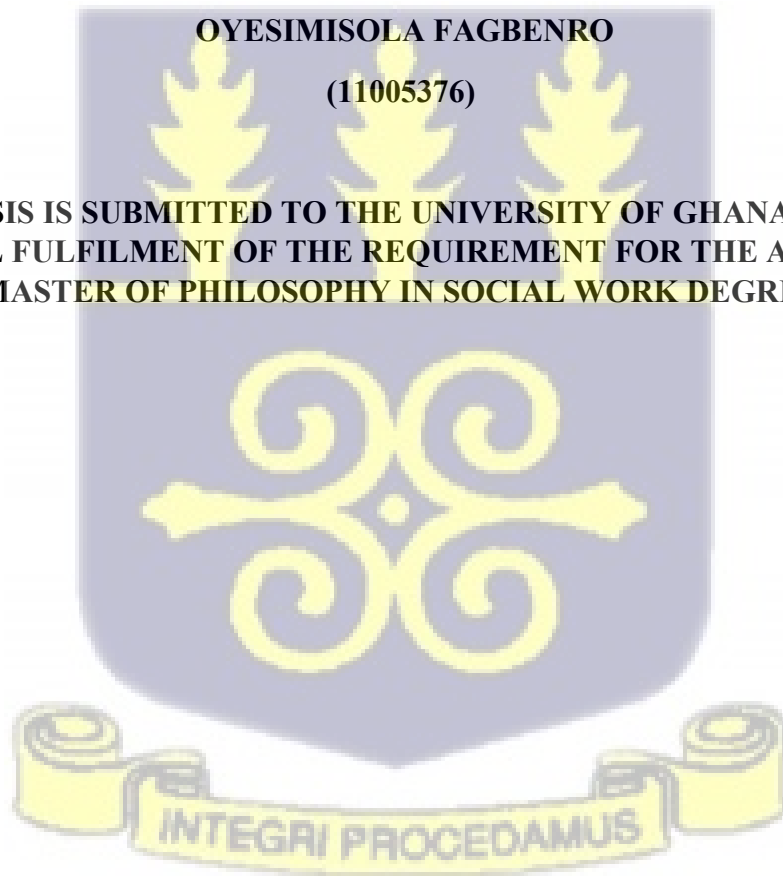
**CYBERBULLYING: EXPLORING THE EXPERIENCES OF THE YOUTH IN THE
AYAWASO-WEST MUNICIPALITY**

By

OYESIMISOLA FAGBENRO

(11005376)

**THIS THESIS IS SUBMITTED TO THE UNIVERSITY OF GHANA, LEGON IN
PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENT FOR THE AWARD OF
MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY IN SOCIAL WORK DEGREE**



DECLARATION

I, Oyesimisola Fagbenro, hereby declare that this MPhil thesis titled, “Cyberbullying: Exploring the Experiences of Youth in Ayawaso-West Municipality”, is my own original work, and to the best of my knowledge, contains no material previously published or written by another person except where duly acknowledged in the text. I further declare that this thesis has not been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification at any institution.



.....
OYESIMISOLA FAGBENRO

STUDENT

23/07/2025

DATE



DR. DORIS AKYERE-BOATENG

SUPERVISOR

July 28, 2025

DATE



DR. KINGSLEY SAA-TOUH MORT

SUPERVISOR

01/08/2025

DATE:



DEDICATION

To God for the strength and grace, and to my family for their strength and support in my academic journey.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To God, for the strength, knowledge, ability and opportunity to undertake this study and complete it satisfactorily. To my respected supervisors, Dr. Doris Akyere-Boateng and Dr. Kingsley Saa-Touh Mort for their continuous guidance, encouragement, and relentless support throughout the course of my research. To my family, friends and colleagues for their unwavering support and understanding during the course of my programme.

A heartfelt thanks and God's blessings to you all.



ABSTRACT

This study explores the experiences of young persons who have become victims of cyberbullying in the Ayawaso-West Municipality of Accra, Ghana. The aims of the research were to find out the forms of cyberbullying experienced by the youth, how it affected them, their coping strategies and the reporting mechanisms available to them. The study used a qualitative, phenomenological approach, and involved individual in-depth interviews with Twenty (20) young persons and one key informant from the Cyber Security Authority of Ghana. The study was guided by the Integrated Model of Victimisation as its theoretical base.

The findings of the study revealed that young persons in Accra experienced the various forms of cyberbullying that exist and that the lack of awareness of the cyberbullying phenomenon persists, as most of the victims did not know that what they experienced at the time was cyberbullying. Females were also more likely to face harassment related to their private videos or photos being distributed online without their consent than their male counterparts. Cyberbullying affects youths negatively mentally, physically, emotionally and psychologically, academically and socially. Young people adopt several ways to cope with the issue of cyberbullying either through technological or social support and parents and school authorities are not seen as reliable available reporting mechanisms for youth who experience cyberbullying.



TABLE OF CONTENTS

DECLARATION.....	2
DEDICATION.....	3
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	4
ABSTRACT	5
TABLE OF CONTENTS	6
LIST OF TABLES	9
LIST OF FIGURES	9
CHAPTER ONE	10
INTRODUCTION.....	10
1.0Background of the Study.....	10
1.1 Statement of Problem	14
1.3 Research Objectives.....	15
1.4 Research Questions.....	16
1.5 Definition of Key Concepts.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
1.6 Significance of the Study	16
1.7 Organisation of the Study.....	17
CHAPTER TWO	19
LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE	19
2.0 Forms of Cyberbullying Experienced by Youth	19
2.1 Ways Cyberbullying Affect Youth	20
2.2 Coping Strategies of Youth Who Experience Cyberbullying.....	22
2.3 Available Reporting Mechanisms for Cyberbullying	23
2.4 Theoretical Perspective: Integrated Model of Victimisation	25
2.5 Application of the Integrated Model of Victimisation to The Study	30
2.6 Usefulness of the Integrated Model of Victimisation to The Study	31
CHAPTER THREE.....	33
METHODOLOGY	33
3.0 Introduction.....	33
3.1 Research Design	33
3.2 Study Location	34
3.3 Target Population	35
3.4 Study Population	35

3.5 Sampling Techniques and Recruitment.....	35
3.6 Sample Size	37
3.7 Inclusion Criteria	38
3.8 Exclusion Criteria	38
3.9 Data Collection Methods	38
3.10 Data Handling	39
3.11 Data Analysis.....	39
3.12 Ethical Considerations.....	45
3.13 Credibility and Trustworthiness.....	46
3.14 Limitations of the Study	46
CHAPTER FOUR.....	47
PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS	47
4.0 Introduction.....	47
4.1 Demographic Characteristics.....	47
4.2 Objective One: Forms of cyberbullying experienced by youth.....	49
4.2.1 Direct forms of cyberbullying	49
4.2.1.1 Indirect forms of cyberbullying	52
4.2.2 OBJECTIVE 2: How cyberbullying affects youth	54
4.2.2.1 Health Impact.....	54
4.2.2.2 Academic Impact.....	59
4.2.2.3 Social Impact	62
4.2.3 Objective 3: Strategies to cope with Cyberbullying.....	64
4.2.3.1 Technological Solution.....	64
4.2.3.2 Seeking Social Support	68
4.2.3.3 Emotional, Cognitive and Behavioural Coping.....	71
4.2.4 Objective 4: Available Reporting Mechanisms	73
4.3 Discussion of findings.....	76
4.3.1 Forms of cyberbullying experienced by youth	76
4.3.2 How Cyberbullying Affects Youth	78
4.3.3 Coping Strategies to Deal with Cyberbullying	81
4.3.4 Available Reporting Mechanisms.....	83
CHAPTER 5.....	87
SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS.....	87
5.0 Introduction.....	87
5.1 Summary of Findings.....	87
5.2 Conclusions	89

5.3 Recommendations	90
5.4 Implications for Social Work.....	91
REFERENCES.....	93
APPENDIX 1	104
APPENDIX 2	105
APPENDIX 3	109



LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Sample of generation of codes and themes.....	41
Table 2: Demographic Information of Youth who have Experienced Cyberbullying.....	48

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Integrated Model of Victimisation (Fohring, 2014).....	27
--	----



CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Background of the Study

Bullying is aggressive goal-directed behaviour that harms another individual within the context of a power imbalance (Volk et al., 2014). The old thought that bullying takes place only within the school area or on the streets has been dispelled by the emergence of the internet, which has introduced a new form of bullying (Antiri, 2016). Nowadays, bullies have taken to the use of technology to perpetuate the act of bullying (Yaro, 2020). Cyberbullying has been categorised under bullying as one occurring in the digital realm/medium of electronic text (Wong & Bullock, 2011). It has been defined as deliberate, repetitive behaviour exhibited with the goal of hurting other people through electronic mail, text messages, social networks and gaming sites (Webber & Ovedovitz, 2018).

The Information Technology industry has brought in a lot of innovative breakthroughs that has led to the increase in the rate of penetration of the internet as well as the consistent growth of internet users in developing nations (International Telecommunication Union, 2021). After the COVID-19 pandemic, there was a rise in internet usage, due to measures such as lockdown and social distancing, which caused firms and educational institutions to shift from in-person communication to internet-based services, compelling the youth to spend majority of their time at home, thus increasing the amount of time spent on the internet for purposes other than academics, like gaming and other social activities (De et al., 2020; Onukwuli et al., 2023).

People under the age of 18 account for about one-third of all internet users worldwide (Statista, 2023). Africa has also seen a rise in the mobile device adoption which has boosted internet access on the continent and has its young people as the most connected demographic globally,

showing that 71% of those between the ages of 15 to 24 are online, compared to 48% of the overall population (UNICEF, 2019).

Africa has seen an increase from 120 million in 2014 to 270 million in 2019 in internet use (Okae & Gyasi, 2013). In Ghana, internet use is prevalent across all age groups, but youth (ages 15-29) have the highest usage rate (80%), followed closely by the 30-40 age cohort (78%) which is a similar pattern to what is observed in developed economies like the US (Ghana Statistical Service, 2021). Young people use the internet for various reasons, of which the major ones include communicating with friends and family, education, finding information, identity building, entertainment, gambling, and job hunting. It is known that involvement in online activities presents prospects for social development in young people (Navarro et al., 2016).

The unique and exceptional nature of cyberspace makes it an ideal environment for aggression (Liang, 2024). One of such is anonymity, where the identity of users is concealed, thereby emboldening them to carry out actions that cannot be traced back to them. Jealousy, conflicts, revenge and resentment from previous relationships, presence of disability or difference in physical appearance, along with the growing usage of mobile phones and networked computers are among the root causes of cyberbullying (Otchere et al., 2021). Other risk factors include increased online activity, social media usage, prior experiences of bullying, family conflict, mental health issues (Kowalski et al., 2014; Hertz et al., 2017).

However, there is evidence that raises concerns about the negative impact of the internet on children and youth (McDool et al., 2020), with one of the most prevalent being cyberviolence which is described as any online action that assaults or endangers a person physically, psychologically, emotionally (Alotaibi, 2019). Cyberviolence can take many different forms such as harassment (including bullying), threat texts, stalking, revenge porn, outing which involves revealing embarrassing or secret information about someone, sextortion, flaming – the use of abusive and offensive languages, fraping which involves taking over someone's

account to post sensitive information that can humiliate them, denigration which is posting false information that can damage someone's image, impersonation (Mukred et al., 2024). Young persons are the most vulnerable to cyberviolence and account for majority of the victims (Al-Zahrani, 2015).

Very few researchers in Ghana have looked into the concept, manner, nature, and extent of cyberbullying. Sam et al. (2018) suggest that this absence of research on this type of bullying may be related in part to how bullying is viewed in the Ghanaian society. Also, because the nation of Ghana is still relatively new to the internet, cyberbullying is still a relatively undiscovered phenomenon. As a result of the little research available surrounding the phenomenon, there exist youth who experience the phenomenon daily, some of whom are not even aware (Kwode et al., 2020). Sam et al. (2018) further note that cyberbullying may be a “normality” among Ghanaian youths, not in the sense that it is socially accepted or encouraged, but rather that it has become a frequent and familiar aspect of young people's digital interactions. This observation reflects a worrying trend of desensitization, where repeated exposure to online harassment, ridicule, and impersonation may cause youth to perceive such behaviours as typical, inevitable, or unworthy of formal reporting. In some cases, victims do not even identify their experiences as cyberbullying, further reinforcing its normalized status. The study also points to the absence of consistent adult intervention and limited public discourse about online harm as contributing factors to this normalization. Moreover, in a context where digital literacy is still developing and reporting mechanisms are not widely understood or trusted, many young people may internalize cyberbullying as “part of being online.”

In February 2018, the Ghanaian Parliament began debating potential legislation to address rising incidents of cyberbullying and other forms of online harm, such as the non-consensual sharing of intimate images. However, consensus on the appropriate legal framework could not

be reached at the time, delaying immediate regulatory action. This legislative impasse was later resolved with the passage of the Cybersecurity Act, 2020 (Act 1038), which marked a major step forward in Ghana's digital governance efforts. The Act established the Cybersecurity Authority (CSA) as the national body responsible for overseeing cybersecurity policy, standards, education, incident response, and enforcement mechanisms.

The CSA operates at both macro and micro levels. At the macro level, it develops national cybersecurity strategies, regulations, and accreditation systems. At the micro level, the Authority directly engages with the public by offering accessible mechanisms for individuals and organizations to report cyber incidents, including cyberbullying, through online forms, dedicated email addresses, and hotline numbers. These platforms are intended to empower the public to act when facing digital threats, and they reflect the Authority's commitment to both institutional oversight and individual protection. By bridging national-level regulation with grassroots-level reporting and support, the CSA plays a critical role in responding to and mitigating cyber-related harms in Ghana (CSA, 2024).

Given Ghana's notably high rate of internet usage among youth, which ranks among the highest in Africa, alongside the relatively recent development of national cybersecurity frameworks such as the 2020 Cybersecurity Act and the establishment of the Cyber Security Authority, the Ghanaian context offers both a distinctive and illustrative case for the examination of cyberbullying (CSA, 2024). This context is distinctive due to the rapid expansion of digital access among Ghanaian youth, which frequently surpasses awareness, parental guidance, and institutional readiness. Concurrently, the fundamental challenges associated with anonymity, platform affordances, and the social stigma linked to reporting abuse are global. Consequently, while this study is grounded in the lived experiences of Ghanaian youth, it also seeks to generate insights applicable to other nations experiencing similar transitions in digital connectivity and youth online engagement. This dual framing positions Ghana not only as a

context of concern but also as a valuable lens through which the broader effects of cyberbullying can be more comprehensively understood.

Moreover, activities like the International Day Against Violence and Bullying in Schools, including cyberbullying, which happen every year, have also been organised to create awareness of cyberbullying among children and youth in schools (UNESCO Ghana Commission, 2021). Social media platforms like Twitter, Snapchat, and Instagram have also developed policies and tools to address forms of cyberbullying flagged by their users (Milosevic, 2016). Despite these interventions that have been put in place, the problem of cyberbullying still exists and is increasing in Ghana (Ghansah, 2022).

1.1 Statement of Problem

Cyberbullying has emerged as a widespread and damaging form of online violence, particularly among youth, due to the increasing use of digital devices and platforms for communication, entertainment, and social networking (Webber & Ovedovitz, 2018; Wong & Bullock, 2011). Defined as deliberate, repeated aggression carried out using electronic means, cyberbullying can result in severe emotional, psychological, and academic consequences for its victims, including depression, anxiety, withdrawal, and even suicidal ideation (Maurya et al., 2022; Sanders, 2019).

In Ghana, internet usage among young people is rapidly increasing, with 80% of individuals aged 15–29 being active internet users (Ghana Statistical Service, 2021). However, this rise in connectivity has not been accompanied by sufficient awareness, digital literacy, or institutional mechanisms to protect users from harm. A few studies have examined the occurrence of cyberbullying in Ghana, but they have largely employed quantitative methods, focusing on prevalence and demographic trends, particularly among adolescents in school settings (Sam et

al., 2018; Otchere et al., 2021; Kwode, 2020). These studies have shown that many young people experience cyberbullying frequently and may even perceive it as a normal part of online life, leading to desensitization and underreporting.

Yet, little is known about how young Ghanaians personally interpret these experiences, what coping strategies they use, and how they engage with available reporting systems. In many cases, cultural factors such as fear of family shame, social stigma, or parental punishment may prevent victims from speaking out (Cassidy et al., 2013; Parris et al., 2012). Moreover, while digital platforms provide tools for reporting abuse, many youths distrust their effectiveness or are unaware they exist (Agbeko & Kwa-Aidoo, 2018).

This study, therefore, addresses the gap in qualitative research on cyberbullying among Ghanaian youth by exploring the lived experiences of individuals aged 15–29. It investigates how young people describe and respond to cyberbullying, the psychological and social impacts they face, the coping strategies they adopt, and the barriers that influence their willingness or ability to report these incidents. By doing so, the study aims to inform policy, practice, and education around digital safety and youth protection in Ghana.

1.3 Research Objectives

The objectives of this study were:

1. To explore the forms of cyberbullying experienced by young people in Ghana.
2. To find out the ways cyberbullying affects young people who have experienced the phenomenon in Ghana.
3. To identify the coping strategies employed by young people who have experienced the phenomenon in Ghana.

4. To explore the reporting mechanisms available to young people who have experienced the phenomenon in Ghana.

1.4 Research Questions

The research questions which were formulated to guide this study were:

1. What are the forms of cyberbullying experienced by young people in Ghana?
2. In what ways does cyberbullying affect young people who have experienced the phenomenon in Ghana?
3. What are the coping strategies employed by young people who have experienced the phenomenon in Ghana?
4. What reporting mechanisms are available for young people who have experienced cyberbullying in Ghana?

1.5 Significance of the Study

The goal of this study is to bring clarity to the phenomenon of cyberbullying. It is hoped that the findings of the study will aid policymakers, social workers, Non-Governmental Organisations, students of social work and other researchers.

1. Contribution to Policy

The findings of the study could provide policymakers in charge of communication with insightful data on ways by which cyberbullying manifests, the types and how it affects youth, thereby aiding the creation of relevant policies and intervention programmes to prevent and address cyberbullying and its effects especially among youth in Ghana.

2. Contribution to Social Work Practice

Cyberbullying is an emerging trend worldwide whose effects can affect every area of youth's lives. The study could be useful for social workers especially in schools to identify sudden

behavioural changes in students caused by cyberbullying victimisation. Additionally, findings could be useful to help distressed youth victims of cyberbullying by collaborating with other school staff and school administrators to set up structures that prevent cyberbullying on and off school grounds, as well as widening their understanding as to the motives behind cyberbullying activities to be able to educate the wider public.

3. Contribution to Research

As several gaps exist on cyberbullying in the Ghanaian context, there is need for more research to be conducted within the scope of cyberbullying. Findings from the study could provide new and insightful knowledge on the experiences of youth, and can be used by researchers as reference material for future studies on cyberbullying. Records of interviews, observations and interview guides are valuable assets for future researchers exploring the cyberbullying phenomenon in Ghana.

4. Contribution to Social Work Education

The findings of the research could offer valuable insight for social work education, particularly in the areas of trauma-informed practice, online safety and adolescent well-being. By exploring the complexities of cyberbullying and its impact on youths, social work students could gain a deeper understanding of the role of technology in shaping social relationships and the importance of addressing digital literacy and online citizenship in practice. Furthermore, integrating this research into social work education can enhance the profession's response to cyberbullying and foster a new generation of practitioners equipped to address the complex challenges of the digital age.

1.6 Organisation of the Study

The study is organised into five chapters. Chapter One introduces the background, statement of the problem, research objectives and questions, significance of the study, and organisation

of the study, Chapter Two reviews existing literature on cyberbullying, focusing on the various types, effects, coping strategies and reporting and grievance control mechanisms, as well as the theoretical perspective underpinning the study. Chapter Three outlines the research methodology including the design, study area, populations, sampling strategy, methods of data collection, handling and data analysis procedures. Chapter Four presents the study's findings, including demographic characteristics of participants and the discussion of the findings. Chapter Five concludes the study with the summary of the findings, conclusions, recommendations for stakeholders and implications or social work.



CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

Cyberbullying, a pervasive and complex issue, has garnered significant attention from researchers, policymakers and practitioner in recent years. To understand the nuances of cyberbullying and its effects on young persons, it is essential to examine the existing body of knowledge. This chapter highlights the literature reviewed and theoretical perspective underpinned for this study. Available literature would be comprehensively reviewed based on the objectives under the subheadings of forms of cyberbullying experienced by youth, the ways cyberbullying affects youth, their coping strategies, and available reporting mechanisms to youth who have experienced the phenomenon. Additionally, the Integrated Model of Victimization and its relevance to the study are discussed in the latter part of this chapter.

2.0 Forms of Cyberbullying Experienced by Youth

Cyberbullying has become a pervasive issue among youth in today's age. Research indicates that cyberbullying encompasses various forms of aggressive behavior online. Kowalski et al. (2014) highlight that cyberbullying can involve direct forms, such as sending threatening messages or spreading rumors online. Additionally, indirect forms of cyberbullying, such as excluding individuals from online groups or spreading embarrassing content without their consent, are also prevalent especially on social media and texting platforms (Kowalski et al., 2014; Kowalski et al., 2020).

Other studies such as Agbeko and Kwa-Aidoo's (2018), Khine et al. (2020) and Ulah et al. (2022), have highlighted specific forms of cyberbullying including fraping which is impersonation, harassment which refers to when a cyberbully repeatedly sends insulting messages on social media, denigration which refers to dissing someone online including transmitting or publishing tales or slander about someone in order to get them into trouble or

to harm their friendships or reputation, outing which involves sharing of secrets, embarrassing information or photos and videos without the person's permission, flaming and cyberstalking which repeated, intense harassment and denigration that includes threats or creating a significant amount of fear in the victim. With the most prevalent being fraping.

Additionally, young people report receiving cyberthreats in the form of threats or "distressing material," which are generic words that give the impression that the person is agitated and may be thinking about hurting someone else.

On Facebook especially, students were mostly exposed to shame, impersonation, blackmail, and cyberstalking as forms of cyberbullying (Kamau, 2017).

Other forms of cyberbullying which are not grouped into types but are experienced by youth include someone making fun of them, someone making or manipulating videos or photos of them to distribute through social networks, eliminating or blocking from groups to leave them without any friends, calling of cell phones and hanging up to bother or frighten them (Alsawaqa, 2021). These findings from literature suggest that cyberbullying can manifest in different ways, making it crucial to understand the specific forms it takes among youth in Ghana.

2.1 Ways Cyberbullying Affect Youth

The effects of cyberbullying are more detrimental than that of traditional bullying (Campbell, 2005), this is because these offensive posts stay online and cause the victims to be inconvenienced for a long time. Cyberbullying victimization can have a detrimental, recurring effect on the individual, in contrast to traditional bullying. (Schunk et al., 2022). Although, Sam et al. (2018) indicates that the psychological wellbeing of those who have experienced the phenomenon did not differ from that of those who had not experienced the phenomenon, they speculate that cyberbullying might be an everyday acceptable behavior among Ghanaian youth.

However, other literature suggests that cyberbullying affects youth in their physical, psychological, emotional and academic lives (Kwode et al., 2020) and manifests in different ways.

Cyberbullying negatively impacts academic performance, as victims experience decreased motivation to excel in school (Hinduja & Patchin, 2012). Some youth receive so much negative comments and become afraid of themselves and doubt their abilities which also deters them from concentrating in school. Closely related to this, is youth admitting to skipping school to avoid being picked on, repeating a grade, paying less attention to their school work, and even having thoughts of quitting school, all as a result of cyberbullying and online violence (UNICEF, 2019, Farhangpour et al., 2019). Thus, victims experience decreased academic achievement and increased dropout rates in some cases (Kowalksi et al., 2014).

Cyberbullying affects youth's social relationships. While some who experience cyberbullying become depressed, frustrated, begin to intentionally avoid family and friends, embrace social isolation leading to decreased social support and difficulties forming healthy relationships (Kowalski et al., 2014; Hertz et al., 2017). Research also consistently shows that cyberbullying leads to increased stress, anxiety, and depression among youth. are paranoid, feel self-conscious, have suicidal thoughts, engage in self-injury, are humiliated, ashamed and hurt (Otchere et al., 2021; Farhangpour et al., 2019), others resorted to joining gangs to avoid being bullied again because bullies frequently target people who are weak, socially isolated, or who might not be aware of social rules. Joining such gangs also expose them to learning bad behaviours (Irabor & Osebor, 2021; Lee et al., 2023).

It is also noted that other youths who experienced cyberbullying encounter health problems such as anxiety, headache, appetite loss, and trouble sleeping (Beckman et al., 2012; Schneider et al., 2012; Kowalski and Limber, 2013). The constant exposure to harassment, humiliation or exclusion can lead to increased stress, anxiety and depression. These negative emotions can

further exacerbate physical health issues such as headaches, sleep disturbances and even gastrointestinal problems. Moreover, cyberbullying can also impact a young person's self-esteem, confidence and overall mental well-being leading to social withdrawal, decreased academic performance and even suicidal thoughts or behaviours. The pervasive nature of digital technology means that cyberbullying can be relentless, making it challenging for victims to escape the negative effects.

2.2 Coping Strategies of Youth Who Experience Cyberbullying

Coping with cyberbullying can be difficult. Youth who have experienced cyberbullying adopt various coping strategies preferable to them. Coping strategies are actions (as well as feelings and thoughts) that are effective (or ineffective) in combating cyberbullying. (Perren et al., 2012). Coping strategies manage and alleviate stress, anxiety or other difficult emotions that can arise from traumatic incidents like cyberbullying. There are both positive and negative coping strategies. Positive coping strategies will include seeking social support, utilising technological features and seeking help from authorities or professionals. Negative coping strategies will include avoidance of the platform, retaliating or doing nothing.

According to existing studies, limiting the aggressor's ability to communicate by utilizing the technical features of the instrument that was used to carry out the act was the most common way of coping with cyberbullying victimization (Machakova et al., 2013; Orel et al., 2017; Šléglová and Cerna, 2018). This involves blocking the bully, reporting the bully to the authority in charge of the media tool, and retaliation on the same platform. This type of coping strategy helped the youth who had experienced cyberbullying to feel in charge of the situation and not feel like a victim.

Another type of coping strategy adopted by youth who had experienced cyberbullying which can be classified as passive coping strategies includes avoidance of the platform on which the

act was perpetuated, ignoring or doing nothing about the incident due to fear of being attacked, and devotion to hobbies to distract themselves (Heiman et al., 2019; Machackova et al., 2013). Seeking social support has also been identified as one of the successful ways to cope with the experience of cyberbullying (Chan & Wong, 2017). Here, social support would be the individuals or groups offering practical, emotional, and informational support or groups to those affected by cyberbullying. This support can come from family members, friends, peers, teachers, mental health professionals, online communities and forums, helplines and hotlines and school counsellors. While some believe they can tell people mostly parents and teachers to help them with the incident through providing solutions or encouragement, the few who do not tell parents, teachers or authorities, decide to tell their friends (Frisen et al., 2014; Hellfeldt et al., 2019). Holt and Espelage (2007) found that it was majorly the support from friends that was effective especially in reducing the psychological impact of cyberbullying for the victims. One of the negative coping strategies young persons used involved resorting to drug use to handle psychological distress from the incident (Cenat et al., 2018).

2.3 Available Reporting Mechanisms for Cyberbullying

Effective reporting mechanisms are crucial in mitigating the effects of cyberbullying. These reporting and grievance control mechanisms are usually developed by organisations, government, organisations and technology companies. They're aimed at providing a safe and supportive environment for individuals to report incidents and seek help.

Internet service providers and social networking sites provide a number of services that can be utilised in dealing with the incident of cyberbullying. They have a duty to educate each user on the platform on the reporting mechanism available to deal with the incident of cyberbullying (Upadhyay et al., 2023).

Although it is expected of schools to have policies against cyberbullying, these policies often have little effect and can cause more harm than good, as incidents can be announced in the bid to warn bullies, causing more trouble and humiliation for the victims (Hartzler, 2021). According to Pennel et al. (2022), teachers are obligated to report to parents or guardians, a decision most students find unwelcoming, hence their reluctance to report incidents of cyberbullying. Students welcome an anonymous reporting system (Faucher et al., 2020).

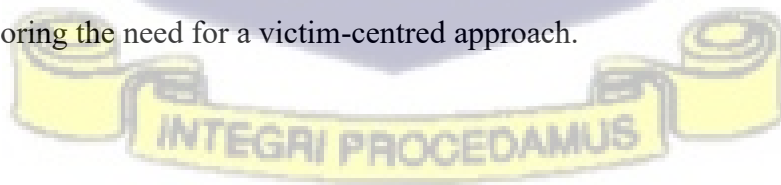
Also, as cyberbullying occurs outside the school setting and so many youths who have experienced cyberbullying cannot and do not report to school authorities because the incidents usually happen at home. (Agbeko & Kwa-Aidoo, 2018).

In most cases, youth who have experienced cyberbullying are scared or reluctant to report incidents to their parents, teachers or other adults because they feel they could be punished, or perhaps forfeit their computers, laptops, internet, or cell phone privileges (Jacob et al., 2015; Ngo et al., 2021). According to Daneback et al. (2018), youth who had experienced cyberbullying did not report for a number of reasons, the most common being that thought they could manage on their own, while the least common being that they did not trust anyone or were afraid that telling would make the situation even worse. In Ghana, students who experience cyberbullying can report incidents to various authorities like the Cyber Security Authority, school's administration or guidance counsellors who can provide support and escalate the issue if necessary. Students can also reach out to organisations focused on promoting online safety and digital rights, which may offer guidance and assistance. These reporting opportunities provide students with avenues to seek help and address cyberbullying incidents.

2.4 Theoretical Perspective: Integrated Model of Victimization

Various theoretical perspectives exist to explain the occurrence of cyberbullying. This study explored the experiences of youth victims of cyberbullying, with the decision to use the Integrated Model of Victimization.

Just World Theory (Lerner, 1980) notes that people generally believe the world is fair, so when they suffer unmeritorious harm, it disrupts their sense of justice. Shattered Assumptions (Janoff-Bulman, 1992) explains how traumatic events can undermine basic beliefs about safety, trust, and benevolence in one's environment. Selective Evaluation (Taylor et al., 1983) describes the cognitive strategies, such as minimizing harm or attributing blame elsewhere, that victims use to protect their self-image. By weaving these three lenses together, the Integrated Model of Victimization offers a dual focus on both the observable facts of an event (its type, frequency, and severity) and the internal, meaning-making processes through which individuals label themselves as victims and cope with their experiences. The model also attempts to address how different factors interact to influence the likelihood of an individual being victimised. Further, it draws attention to how victims' labels and perceptions of an incident affect how they react to it later on, namely whether they believe that an incident was criminal, leading to the perception of themselves as victims. The Integrated Model of Victimization provides a nuanced understanding of non-involvement with the criminal justice system by accounting for subjective perceptions, societal influences and practical barriers, thereby underscoring the need for a victim-centred approach.



Fohring proposes that instead of concentrating on just one facet of victimisation, attention must be directed towards what a broader context might actually entail.

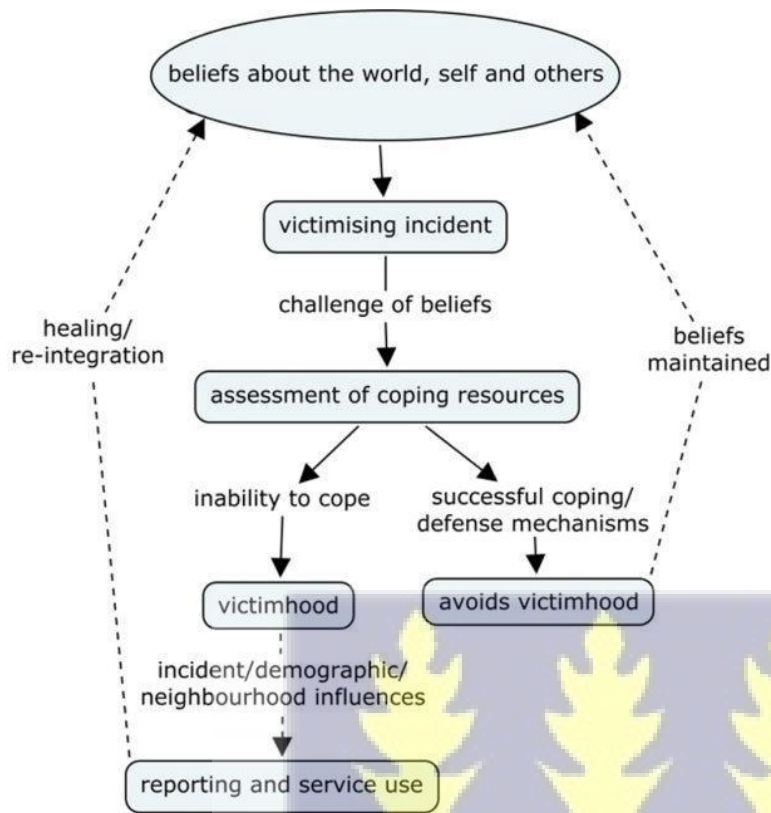


Figure 1: Integrated Model of Victimization (Fohring, 2014)

In reference to Figure 1 (Fohring, 2014), the cycle starts with the beliefs one has about one's self and the world which Lerner (1980) proposes and Janoff-Bulman (1992) which existed before the victimizing event. When an incident of victimization occurs, the model reflects the challenges or shattering of these beliefs inherent in the works of Janoff-Bulman and Frieze (1983), Taylor et al. (1983), Bard and Sangrey (1979), Pilgrim (2003) and Green and Diaz (2007). According to the above proposed model, individuals who are able to either successfully cope with crime or employ any of the techniques of Selective Evaluation (outlined by Taylor et al., 1983 and Fohring, 2012) will be able to stay out of victimhood, which will reduce their likelihood of reporting crimes or seeking victim assistance. Conversely, those who are struggling will be more likely to define themselves as victims (van Dijk, 2009), which will reduce the barriers to reporting and using services.

The model also shows how one might uphold a set of fundamental ideas about the self and the world by either effective coping mechanisms or the eventual healing and integration of the victimising experience. Thus, the model forms one comprehensive model of the victimization experience – taking into consideration preconceived notions but also viewing them as a strong indicator of authorities' involvement.

There are five key elements of the model which include objective victimisation, subjective victimisation, mediating and moderating factors, identity formation and labelling and social and cultural context. The researcher utilised these elements because they emphasize the interplay between the actual experiences of harm and how the individual perceives and internalises the experience, allowing for a nuanced understanding of the experiences of youth victims of cyberbullying.

a. Objective Victimisation

This refers to the factual occurrence of a victimising event such as a crime, accident or harmful incident, it emphasises measurable factors like the type of harm, frequency and duration, severity and situational context. Fohring highlights that while objective victimisation is important, it does not fully determine how individuals experience or respond to harm.

b. Subjective Victimisation

This highlights the victim's personal interpretation and emotional reaction to the event. It recognises that individuals may perceive victimisation differently based on their mental state, cultural background or social influences. It thus highlights that individuals may not label themselves as victims even after an objectively harmful event. Others however may perceive minor incidents as highly traumatic.

c. Mediating and moderating factors

Mediators explain the relationship between victimisation and its outcomes, while moderators affect the strength or direction of those effects. These include variables such as demographics, coping mechanisms, resilience, social support and prior experiences that influence the processing of victimisation.

d. Labelling and identity formation

Fohring emphasises the role of social acknowledgement in shaping a victim's identity. These include adoption of the victim label that can lead to self-stigmatisation or empowerment, recognition and validation which will help them process the experience positively, stigma and rejection which can exacerbate feelings of isolation and prolong trauma.

e. Social and Cultural Context

The model situates victimisation within broader societal and cultural frameworks such as cultural norms, institutional response which influence how victims are treated and perceived and social narratives which involve attitudes toward victimhood whether supportive or dismissive that impact recovery.

The model also incorporates a wide range of factors including individual characteristics, social and environmental context, and opportunity and routine activities to explain why some people are more likely to experience and interpret victimisation than others. These elements are interconnected and provide a holistic view of victimisation.

a. Individual Characteristics

These involve personal traits and circumstances that influence both the likelihood of victimisation and how it is perceived. These key factors include demographics like age and gender, psychological traits like resilience or anxiety, prior experiences and risky behaviours.

b. Social and Environmental Context

The model emphasizes the importance of external surroundings and relationships in shaping victimisation risk and experiences. These key factors include social networks like support systems, cultural norms like societal attitudes, community characteristics and institutional support.

c. Opportunity

This is a core element in victimisation that explains how specific circumstances create conditions for harm. These include proximity to offenders, vulnerability, accessibility of targets.

d. Activities of Routine

According to this theory, victimization will happen when the characteristics of a suitable target, a motivated criminal, and the lack of guardianship come together. Daily routines, lifestyle choices and guardianship can either expose or reduce individuals to risk.

The inclusion of the above in the model helps to understand the multifaceted nature of victimisation, as it highlights how personal, social and situational factors combine to influence not only the likelihood of victimisation but also its interpretation and impact.

2.5 Application of the Integrated Model of Victimization to The Study

Applying the integrated model of victimisation to the study on the experiences of youth victims of cyberbullying provides a comprehensive framework to understand both the subjective and objective dimensions of the issue. Objective victimisation will refer to the actual acts of cyberbullying experienced by these young people which can include the types of harm such as direct actions such as harassment, outing or flaming and indirect actions such as exclusion or denigration which involve spreading false rumours about an individual, frequency and duration of harm for those who encounter regular, repeated cyberbullying, severity of harm, platform-specific dynamics which can facilitate the distinct types of cyberbullying and eventually influence the nature of victimisation.

Subjective victimisation here will focus on how young people interpret and internalise the cyberbullying experiences. This includes the perception of harm where some youth may downplay cyberbullying while others feel deeply affected, emotional responses including reactions such as fear, embarrassment, anger or helplessness, social comparison and identity formation as young people often navigate their self-identity online and being cyberbullied can undermine their self-confidence and self-worth.

Mediating factors will include coping strategies such as blocking, seeking support or internalising the harm, parental and peer support which can buffer the emotional impact of cyberbullying, and cultural attitudes like societal norms around cyberbullying like the toughen up culture can affect how young people perceive and report the incidents. Moderating factors will include demographics, previous victimisation and technological illiteracy.

The social and environmental context of cyberbullying emphasises the broader factors that influence victimisation socially and environmentally. The social factors will include peer dynamics, parental monitoring and the school environment. Environmental factors will include platform policies, and cultural and legal norms.

Opportunity factors such as proximity to offenders because cyberbullying is mostly perpetrated by peers, accessibility involving a constant online presence, visibility by posting personal content, explain how young people expose themselves to online risk. Routine activities like social media usage, guardianship absence and gaming communities create opportunities for cyberbullying to thrive.

Labelling and identity formulation in cyberbullying shows up in the acceptance or rejection of the victim label by adolescents, and young people either being empowered by their victimisation or facing stigma.

2.6 Usefulness of the Integrated Model of Victimization to The Study

The Integrated Model of Victimization was useful because it provided a holistic framework to analyse the issue, whereby not only the occurrence of cyberbullying was addressed but also the subjective, social and environmental factors that shape how it is experienced and understood. The model helped the researcher to identify risk and protective factors by examining how individual characteristics, social environments and routines shape young people's exposure to cyberbullying. The model was also useful in highlighting mediators like parental support and coping mechanisms of youth who had experienced cyberbullying. The insights from the model also helped the researcher to design targeted interventions such as educational programs, digital literacy training or support services for victims.

The model also emphasises subjective victimisation which was critical for understanding young people's unique experiences of cyberbullying and in turn develop effective interventions that resonate with them. The inclusion of psychological theories in the model like identity formulation, mental health and social relationships were invaluable for understanding not just the immediate effects but also the longer-term consequences of cyberbullying.

In conclusion, the integrated model of victimisation was highly relevant to the study as it captured the multifaceted nature of cyberbullying, centred on young people's personal

experiences and perceptions, explored the interplay of individual, social and technological factors and provided actionable insights for prevention and intervention of cyberbullying among youth.



CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

3.0 Introduction

This chapter discusses the research methodology. Various components of the research methodology including the research design, study area, target population, study population, sample size, sampling technique, data collection, data handling and analysis, ethical considerations and limitations of the study are outlined.

3.1 Research Design

This study used a qualitative approach to explore the experiences of youth victims of cyberbullying. Qualitative research provides detailed narrative descriptions as opposed to quantitative research (Lewis, 2015). A qualitative research method was particularly appropriate for this study because it allowed for an in-depth exploration of the subjective experiences, perceptions and social contexts of the young persons who have experienced cyberbullying. Cyberbullying is also a sensitive topic and a qualitative method will allow for a more empathetic and ethical approach to the research.

This study used an in-depth qualitative design, employing semi-structured interviews to capture participants lived experiences of cyberbullying. This approach facilitated exploration of the subjective meanings, perceptions, and social contexts in which these experiences occurred, and is well suited to addressing sensitive topics ethically and empathetically (Lewis, 2015; Creswell & Creswell, 2017) Through this method, an in-depth understanding of the experiences of the participants who are victims of cyberbullying were gained.

3.2 Study Location

The Greater Accra Region of Ghana was specifically chosen for this study. The Greater Accra region is the smallest of the 16 administrative regions in Ghana. The area is about 3,245 square kilometres and is said to be the second most populated region in the country. It is divided into 29 Local Government Areas (LGAs). Most of the LGAs are urban and urban LGAs house more than 80% of the region's residents. The LGAs are classified into districts, municipalities and metropolitan areas, with the metropolitan areas being the most urban. The Greater Accra includes the country's capital city, Accra.

The study was particularly conducted in Accra, the capital of the republic of Ghana. Being one of the most urbanised cities in Ghana, Accra has undergone significant development (World Population Review, 2022), and is the most populous city in the country, with a rapidly growing population of over 2 million. As a globalising city, Accra has seen a rapid rise in digital technology and internet use particularly among the youth.

The Ayawaso-West Municipal is one of the 261 Metropolitan, Municipal and District Assemblies (MMDAs) in Ghana and forms part of the 29 MMDA in the Greater Accra Region. The Ayawaso-West Municipal Assembly was carved out of the Accra Metropolitan Assembly with its capital as Dzorwulu (Ghana Districts, 2021). The Ayawaso-West Municipality is a contemporary and multicultural one, with residents from a wide range of sociocultural backgrounds in the Municipality. There are 6 public and 58 private kindergarten, 6 public and 75 private basic schools, 7 public and 30 private junior high schools, 5 private senior high schools, one vocational school, and 2 public, 4 private universities in the Ayawaso-West Municipality.

The researcher chose three universities and three secondary schools, in the Ayawaso-West Municipality from which participants were recruited. These include the University of Ghana, Legon, The University of Professional Studies Accra, Winsconsin University, American

International School, International Community School and the Lapaz Senior High School. This was due to their proximity to the researcher.

3.3 Target Population

The target population is known as the specific subset or segment within the larger population, which is the primary focus of a study (Banerjee & Chaudhury, 2010). The target population of this study was youth victims of cyberbullying. The study also targeted key informants like officials in charge of cyberbullying cases at the Cyber Security Authority of Ghana.

3.4 Study Population

The study population is the subset of the target population available for study (Banerjee & Chaudhury, 2010). The study population for this research comprised youth between the ages of 15-35, living and schooling in the University of Ghana, the University of Professional Studies Accra, Wisconsin University, American International School, International Community School and the Lapaz Senior High School in the Ayawaso-West Municipality, who had been victims of cyberbullying in the years 2022 to 2023.

Key informants can provide expert knowledge, access to participants, contextual understanding and ethical guidance (Crossham & Johanson, 2019). Alongside twenty youth interviews, the researcher interviewed one senior official from Ghana's Cyber Security Authority who oversees the public reporting portal. Although only one officer was available for the interview due to the CSA's busy schedule, his insights into institutional reporting processes, case escalation, and policy implementation provided critical context for understanding the real-world functioning (and gaps) of formal mechanisms, linking youth accounts and enhancing both the validity and practical relevance of our findings.

3.5 Sampling Techniques and Recruitment

Purposive and snowball sample techniques were used to recruit and select participants who had been victims of cyberbullying between 2022 and 2023. Purposive sampling ensures that the persons with the characteristics needed are available and able to supply the necessary and appropriate details (Lewis & Shepherd, 2006). The use of purposive sampling technique researcher enabled the researcher to better match the sample to the objectives of the research, thus improving the rigour of the study and trust-worthiness of the data and results. Finding hidden populations is frequently accomplished through the nonprobability survey sample selection technique known as “snowball sampling”, which depends on respondents who were first sampled referring additional people who they think possess the desired trait (Johnson, 2014). Combining snowball and purposive sampling was beneficial because it allowed the researcher to access the hard-to-reach population of the study, while still ensuring that the selected participants meet the specific criteria of the study.

The researcher employed a purposive sampling technique in recruiting the key informant. A key informant who had worked in the Cyber Security Authority of Ghana, incident reporting department for more than two years was purposively recruited for the study. Identifying and selecting individuals that are especially knowledgeable about or experienced with a phenomenon of interest to enrich the study is always recommended. (Cresswell & Clark, 2011). Convenience sampling technique was used to select the schools from which participants were chosen for the study due to ease of accessibility, which also allowed for timely data collection. The researcher consulted the Cyber Security Authority of Ghana office to recruit participants who had experienced cyberbullying in the last year for the study. The researcher sent a request letter for assistance in getting participants and was directed to the communications office where incidents of cyberbullying were usually reported. Unfortunately, the authority got back to the

researcher that persons who had reported at the cyberbullying authority could not be used for the study.

The researcher then visited the chosen universities in Ayawaso West Municipality to seek for participants by announcing about the research intention in classes through the help of the class representatives and dropping a contact through which the researcher could be reached. For the senior high schools, the researcher visited the administrative heads in the selected schools and introduced herself, explained the purpose of the research and dropped her contact for interested participants to reach out. Those who initially reached out were then asked if they knew others who fit the inclusion criteria. Participants who reached out to the researcher were streamlined to fit the inclusion criteria. A preliminary interaction was also held with the participants to confirm their eligibility and participation in the study. The research was thoroughly explained to the participants and consent was sought from them to proceed with the study. To recruit the key informant, the researcher reached out to the Cyber Security Authority office, informed them of the study, and the contact of an officer who had worked for at least two years and in charge of incident reporting was given to the researcher.

3.6 Sample Size

In order to get rich qualitative data, the researcher sampled twenty-one (21) participants comprising of both male and female students, and a key informant. This consideration was based on the guidelines for phenomenological studies made by Creswell (1998) which suggested between 5 and 25 and Morse (1994) which suggested at least 6 participants as ideal for a phenomenological study. The researcher conducted twenty-one (21) individual in-depth interviews; twenty (20) interviews with youth between the ages 15 and 35, who have experienced cyberbullying and one (1) key informant from the Cyber Security Authority of Ghana.

3.7 Inclusion Criteria

Only young persons within the ages 15-35 who have experienced cyberbullying in the last year 2022/2023 and live and school in Ayawaso-West Municipality were eligible to partake in the study. This was done to be able to get recent lived experiences.

The key informant who was recruited had worked in the incident reporting department of the Cybersecurity Authority of Ghana in the last year to ensure that they were abreast of the phenomenon and experienced in dealing with incidents and ensure credibility and richness of the data collected.

3.8 Exclusion Criteria

Young persons who had not experienced cyberbullying in the years 2022 and 2023 were excluded from the study. Key informants who work in the Cybersecurity Authority of Ghana but not in the incident reporting department in the years 2022 and 2023, were excluded from the study.

3.9 Data Collection Methods

Data for the study was gathered through primary sources. A semi-structured interview guide was developed by the researcher and used to collect data from the participants of the study. This approach was used in order to gain genuine understanding of participants experiences and foster trust between the researcher and participant. Creswell and Creswell (2017) recommend the use of in-depth interviews in soliciting information from research participants. Two (2) semi-structured interview guides consisting of open-ended questions in English in line with the objectives of the study and existing literature were developed to collect data from the victims of cyberbullying and the key informant from the office of the Cyber Security Authority of Ghana.

Interviews were conducted in English. Eleven (11) of the participants were interviewed in face-to-face meetings, while ten (10) participants were interviewed through two audio-conferencing apps namely WhatsApp and Zoom which were both based on their preference and convenience of timing and location. The interviews were audio-recorded with permission sought for from participants. Each individual interview lasted between 15 and 20 minutes at public places and online.

Demographic information was also taken from the participants, which consisted of gender, age, and current school grade/level; after the researcher had explained the details of the study to all the participants.

3.10 Data Handling

All recordings were secured on the researcher's hard drive with a password for privacy. All the audio recordings were transcribed into English verbatim by the researcher to ensure that no details were missed, were stored in a secure folder on the researcher's laptop, and backed-up on the researcher's google drive to prevent data loss. The researcher used pseudonyms to protect the identity of participants in the study.

3.11 Data Analysis

The six (6) steps of qualitative data analysis as outlined by Creswell and Creswell (2017) were used to make meaning of the qualitative data collected. This began with the organisation and familiarisation of the data by transcribing the recorded interviews verbatim and ensuring the files were saved in a centralised, organised folder with easily identifiable name (e.g., Participant_1_interview) to prepare them for analysis. Secondly, the researcher read through the data thoroughly multiple times to gain a deep understanding of the information in the data,

and identify preliminary themes or ideas. As the researcher read through, initial thoughts and observations were noted down (e.g., Participants mention a lot of emotional distress connected to cyberbullying).

Thirdly, the researcher coded the data by categorising the data into smaller segments that represented important aspects of participants' experiences. For example, quotes about participants emotional reaction to the incidents were coded under "emotional impact". Next, the researcher grouped related codes into broader themes to help interpret the data in relation to the research questions. For example, several codes related to the impact of cyberbullying were grouped under the "health effects". The researcher then described and presented the themes by using narrative passages to convey the findings of the analysis, and finally interpreted the findings of the analysis done.

Table 1: Sample of generation of codes and themes

Data Excerpt	Initial Code	Category	Theme	Sub Theme	Interview Question
"My babe broke up with me because not only her image was tarnished, mine was too and she said she didn't	Isolation	Emotional Impact	Effects of Cyberbullying	Social Impact	How did the cyberbullying event affect any of your relationships?

know what to believe and she would not want to be in a relationship anymore. Even her friends that I was cool with before did not pick my calls when I was trying to get them to beg her for me”					
“The messages made me feel worthless. I even started questioning my self-worth”	Low-self esteem	Emotional Impact	Effect of cyberbullying	Health Effects	What feelings did you experience after the incident?

“I reported the page to Instagram and after some hours, my report was approved and they took the page down, only for a similar account to pop up in my dm for the same thing, with the same threats.	Reporting to the platform	Taking action against the bully	Coping Mechanisms	Technological solutions	Was anything done to stop the incident?
“The constant harassment online made me stop using social media for a while”	Social media withdrawal	Behavioural impact	Effect of cyberbullying	Social impact	How did the incident make you feel?
I told my friends	Seeking social	Taking action	Coping mechanism	Social Support	How did you deal with the

immediately it happened; they were very supportive; we tried to trace the account together but didn't succeed. They even came to visit me to cheer me up. After we played games, they said we should go drink and forget about it. This was actually how I started drinking a lot,	support from peers				feelings you were having?
---	-------------------------------	--	--	--	--------------------------------------



I never really used to fancy drinking, but now I know it helps get my mind of things”					
Many of them don't report because it is not a face-to-face thing that you can go and react, so they would rather ignore and move on with life. I also feel that education about cyberbullying is not well spread in terms of how	Do not report	Reporting	Available reporting mechanisms	nil	Why don't youth report cyberbullying incidents?



and who to report to”					
--------------------------	--	--	--	--	--

3.12 Ethical Considerations

Institutional Review Board (IRB) Ethical Clearance and Approval: The researcher sought for and obtained ethical clearance from the Ethics Committee for Humanities (ECH) University of Ghana before proceeding with the research.

Confidentiality: The researcher ensured that the identities of participants were not revealed to any third party and also ensured that the information given could not be used to trace their identities. The researcher used pseudonyms in place of the actual names of research participants to protect their identity.

Informed Consent: Participants were given consent forms for their approval to be part of the research. The researcher also sought permission from participants before their voices were recorded. All the participants were informed of the purpose and objectives of the study.

Assent: Written assents were obtained from child participants after the purpose of the research was explained in clear, simple language.

Voluntary Participation: Participation in the study was voluntary and participants were given the option to opt out of the study at any point.

Plagiarism: The authors of all the literature used by the researcher were duly referenced to avoid plagiarism.

3.13 Credibility and Trustworthiness

To ensure credibility and trustworthiness, the researcher utilized member checking and peer debriefing. Member checking provided an opportunity to the researcher to seek clarification and confirmation on the data by contacting a few participants to review the themes and interpretation of the data, ensuring they accurately represent their experiences. The researcher also discussed the entire research process with supervisors to identify possible loopholes in the study. Debriefings enhance skills and strengthen the quality and trustworthiness of the data (McMahon & Winch, 2018).

3.14 Limitations of the Study

Due to the small, non-random sample, the findings of this study cannot be generalized to all Ghanaian youth. The study focused on a single municipality (Ayawaso West), and participants were selected through purposive, snowball, and convenience sampling. While this approach enabled access to relevant and information-rich cases, it limits the representativeness of the sample.

Additionally, the reliance on self-reported data may be influenced by participants' memory, willingness to disclose, or personal biases. To address these limitations and improve the trustworthiness of the findings, several strategies were used. First, data triangulation was employed by comparing youth interview responses with insights from a key informant at the Cybersecurity Authority. Second, member checking was conducted by returning summary transcripts to participants for confirmation and clarification. Third, a detailed description of participants' experiences and contextual backgrounds was provided to allow readers to determine how and where findings may be relevant to other settings. These steps enhance the credibility, dependability, and transferability of the study's findings despite the sampling and site-specific limitations.

CHAPTER FOUR

PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

4.0 Introduction

This chapter serves as the core of this research, presenting the findings derived from the data collection process and providing an in-depth discussion of their implications. This chapter begins with a demographic overview of the participants and then systematically organising and summarizing the results in alignment with the research objectives. The findings are presented under the objectives: forms of cyberbullying experienced by youth, how cyberbullying affect youth, coping mechanisms for cyberbullying and available reporting mechanisms for youth who have experienced cyberbullying. Following the presentation of findings, the chapter delves into an interpretive discussion, comparing the results with existing literature and the theoretical perspective used in the study.

4.1 Demographic Characteristics

The study sampled twenty-one (21) participants, which included one (1) key informant. The key informant had more than two (2) years' experience working with the incident reporting department of the cybersecurity office.

Of the twenty (20) participants who were recruited for the study, nine (9) were males and (eleven) 11 were females. Ten (10) participants each were recruited from both the university and the senior high schools. In the senior high schools, there were five (5) participants in year thirteen (13), four (4) participants in year twelve (12) and one participant in year eleven (11). In the universities, there were three (3) participants in level four hundred (400), six (6) participants in level three hundred (300) and one (1) participant in level two hundred (200). Seven (7) of the participants were between age fifteen (15) and eighteen (18), three (3) of the

participants between the ages nineteen (19) and twenty-two (22) and ten (10) between the ages of twenty-three (23) and twenty-six (26). The demographic information of the youths who had experienced cyberbullying are highlighted in the section below.

Table 2: Demographic Information of Youth who have Experienced Cyberbullying

Participant ID	Sex	Age	School	Level of Education
Participant 1	M	24	Wisconsin University	300L
Participant 2	F	25	Wisconsin University	300L
Participant 3	M	20	Wisconsin University	200L
Participant 4	F	23	Wisconsin University	400L
Participant 5	M	25	University of Professional Studies	300L
Participant 6	F	26	University of Professional Studies	300L
Participant 7	F	24	University of Professional Studies	400L
Participant 8	M	24	University of Ghana	400L
Participant 9	F	23	University of Ghana	300L
Participant 10	M	26	University of Ghana	300L
Participant 11	M	18	International Community School	YR13 (A-LEVEL)
Participant 12	F	16	International Community School	YR11 (SHS 2)
Participant 13	F	19	International Community School	YR13 (A-LEVEL)
Participant 14	F	16	American International School	YR12 (SHS 3)
Participant 15	M	17	American International School	YR12 (SHS 3)
Participant 16	M	19	American International School	YR13 (A-LEVEL)
Participant 17	F	18	American International School	YR13 (A-LEVEL)
Participant 18	M	18	Lapaz Community Snr High School	SHS 2

Participant 19	F	18	Lapaz Community Snr High School	SHS 3
Participant 20	F	17	Lapaz Community Snr High School	SHS 3

4.2 Objective One: Forms of cyberbullying experienced by youth

This section focuses on addressing the first research objective which is identifying the various forms of cyberbullying experienced by youth in Ayawaso-West Municipality. Participants in the study experienced different types of cyberbullying grouped under direct and indirect types of cyberbullying on platforms such as Instagram, WhatsApp, Twitter, Facebook and Snapchat. Just one participant revealed that he experienced the incident on a gaming site. Almost all the participants also revealed they did not know who was behind the cyberbullying incident.

4.2.1 Direct forms of cyberbullying

Participants in the study reported experiencing various direct forms of cyberbullying, including harassment, flaming, cyberstalking, threats, and denigration. These incidents occurred across multiple online platforms such as social media, messaging apps, email, and online gaming. The findings reveal not only the diversity in the forms of cyberbullying but also the deeply personal and emotionally distressing nature of these experiences.

One participant, a 25-year-old male, described how a perpetrator attempted to extort money by threatening to release intimate images:

I was home one day when a random Snapchat account messaged me that they had my babe's nudes from my phone and they were going to leak them if I didn't pay money into their account before 6pm that day (Male, 25years, 300l).

This case highlights the exploitative use of personal relationships and intimate content as leverage to demand money. The specific mention of a “random Snapchat account” emphasizes

the anonymity afforded to perpetrators, which can make it challenging for victims to identify or confront them. The sense of urgency imposed by the threat ("before 6 pm") adds to the psychological pressure, reflecting how cyberbullies manipulate time to heighten victim vulnerability.

Another participant, a 26-year-old female, recounted an incident involving threats and cyberstalking:

... a few days later I got some messages on my Facebook account which were pictures of me from the party with threatening messages that they had videos of me and some boys together at the party and were going to release these videos to our school platforms and other platforms that I was on. I thought it was a prank or something so I didn't respond. But later that evening, I received the same messages in my email (Female, 26years, 300l).

This narrative corroborates the earlier finding of leveraging personal content to intimidate victims. However, it also introduces the element of multi-platform persistence. The perpetrator's escalation from Facebook to email demonstrates how cyberbullies adapt and expand their tactics to ensure their threats reach victims. The participant's initial reaction of disbelief; that it might be a "prank", highlights a common challenge in addressing cyberbullying: the difficulty victims face in discerning the seriousness of such threats, often leading to delayed responses.

The experiences of hacking and impersonation, as described by a 20-year-old male participant, bring a new dimension to the study:

My WhatsApp was hacked and there was and there was a broadcast message being circulated to my contacts with my name and image and a short message stating that I was a debtor who had borrowed 5000 cedis from said agency and was not to be

associated with till the debt was paid, and that whoever wanted to help me pay was welcome to transfer the money to an account (Male, 20years, 2001).

This account adds a financial and reputational angle to cyberbullying. Unlike the earlier cases focused on threats and intimidation, this incident involved public defamation and manipulation of the victim's social network. The broadcast message served dual purposes: humiliating the victim and exploiting their contacts for financial gain. This finding resonates with broader issues of cybercrime but also underscores the devastating social consequences for the victim, as their name and image were weaponized to tarnish their reputation.

A key informant provided valuable insights into the prevalence of flaming, emphasizing its normalization in digital interactions:

If you look at the incidents that people report, you realize that most of them are incidents of abusive texts, which is what is commonly called flaming. Both children and adults exchange words and insults on social media just to humiliate another person. You hear things like 'you are ugly', 'your head is like this' (Male, KI).

This observation ties into the broader theme of verbal abuse and its trivialization in online spaces. Flaming often appears as a low-level form of cyberbullying but can escalate into more targeted and harmful behaviours, as seen in the earlier accounts. The informant's remarks also suggest a cultural desensitization to such exchanges, which may normalize abusive behaviour and reduce the likelihood of victims seeking help.

In all, these findings reveal the multifaceted nature of direct cyberbullying. While each account provides a unique lens; extortion, threats, defamation, or verbal abuse, they also interconnect to paint a broader picture of how technology is used to exploit, intimidate, and harm. The persistence and adaptability of perpetrators, coupled with the anonymity afforded by digital platforms, complicate intervention efforts. These accounts underline the urgent need for

preventive measures, reporting mechanisms, and educational initiatives to address the growing menace of cyberbullying.

4.2.1.1 Indirect forms of cyberbullying

Participants described indirect forms of cyberbullying that, while less overt than direct attacks, inflicted significant emotional distress. These forms included exclusion from online spaces, social manipulation, fraping (unauthorized access to someone's social media account to post inappropriate content), trolling, and harassment by proxy. The findings reveal the subtle but pervasive nature of these behaviours and their capacity to cause harm, often by leveraging collective dynamics or exploiting vulnerabilities.

A 23-year-old female participant recounted an instance of harassment by proxy, which unfolded after she participated in a social media debate:

“You know abortion is a trending topic on social media, so I posted a comment on a twitter thread, just sharing my own opinion on the discussion on abortion. You needed to see the flood of comments from people I had never even interacted with before. They called me names, told me I was stupid, and even made personal attacks about my appearance”

Her experience highlights how controversial topics, amplified by social media's viral nature, can escalate into harassment. The participant's remark that the aggressors were strangers indicates how indirect bullying often extends beyond known circles, fuelled by anonymity and collective behaviour online. Harassment by proxy; where individuals recruit others to join in the bullying, compounds the victim's sense of helplessness, as the attacks become widespread and impersonal. This incident illustrates how social media algorithms, which amplify popular or contentious content, can unintentionally facilitate cyberbullying.

Adding another dimension, a 19-year-old male participant shared his experience of exclusion from an online gaming group:

“I am a lover of videogames and sometimes I even pay to be part of groups to compete with other players. I had been part of this gaming community for months, suddenly I was kicked out of the group, no explanation, no warning of any kind. I tried to reach out to my former teammates individually and I was blocked by them, no response. It was later I realised one of the players must have had a grudge against me” (Male, 19, YR 13).

This account offers a different perspective on indirect cyberbullying, focusing on social manipulation and exclusion. Unlike the previous example, where the harassment was public and direct, this form of bullying involves silent ostracism, depriving the victim of community and collaboration. The lack of explanation and abrupt nature of the exclusion deepens the emotional impact, leaving victims to grapple with uncertainty and isolation. This finding underscores the unique challenges posed by cyberbullying in niche online communities, where interpersonal conflicts can escalate into collective exclusion.

Both narratives underscore a critical nuance of indirect cyberbullying: its reliance on collective dynamics. While the first example illustrates how online harassment by proxy amplifies harm through numbers, the second demonstrates how social manipulation weaponizes group dynamics to isolate and exclude. Despite their differences, both forms share a common thread; the use of subtle, yet deeply personal, tactics to erode victims’ sense of belonging and self-worth.

These findings also reveal the enduring impact of indirect cyberbullying. While direct bullying often involves overt aggression, indirect behaviours are insidious, often leaving victims to question their standing, relationships, or even self-perception. Moreover, the digital

permanence of these acts; whether in the form of sustained harassment or enduring exclusion, magnifies their effects.

4.2.2 OBJECTIVE 2: How cyberbullying affects youth

Under the second objective which was to find out the ways cyberbullying affected youths, many of the participants said the cyberbullying incident affected them negatively in different aspects from which the following themes were derived, health, academic and social impact.

4.2.2.1 Health Impact

The participants' narratives revealed the profound health consequences of cyberbullying, which affected them across multiple dimensions: mental, physical, psychological, emotional, and behavioural. Words frequently used by participants; such as anxiety, stress, fear, confusion, depression, frustration, insomnia, low self-esteem, and avoidance, painted a vivid picture of the emotional toll cyberbullying took on them.

One participant shared the distress she experienced when faced with the possibility of intimate videos being leaked:

Whenever my parents were not home, I would be in deep thoughts and cry myself to sleep. If I wasn't crying or sleeping then I was thinking. I couldn't even eat well because it bothered me a lot. I was scared that they would eventually leak these videos if I didn't send money to them. I thought of the shame of resuming for the session after everyone had seen my videos during the holiday. (Female, 26years, 300L)

The participant's voice in expressing this concern highlights the profound emotional toll cyberbullying exerts, triggering intense fear and shame that disrupts fundamental routines such as eating and sleeping. The participant's struggles with crying, loss of appetite, and insomnia

illustrate how the psychological burden of cyberbullying spills into physical health, creating a vicious cycle of distress. When coupled with extortion, as in this case, the situation becomes even more overwhelming, as victims grapple with the dual pressures of managing threats and anticipating public humiliation. This amplifies feelings of vulnerability and isolation, leaving the victim in a state of persistent anxiety and emotional paralysis, unable to seek relief or support.

Similarly, a 20-year-old male participant described the anxiety and hypervigilance he endured during his ordeal:

I was constantly on edge, checking my phone every minute, as I was worried if another message would pop up on the issue or what the scammer was going to do next. (Male, 20years, 200L)

In the distress of being scammed, the participant's account underscores the relentless psychological burden inflicted by cyberbullying, where victims are ensnared in a cycle of fear and anticipation. The constant vigilance—checking their phone repeatedly—reveals how deeply the incident disrupts their sense of safety and control, leaving them unable to disconnect from the source of anxiety. This state of hyper-awareness fosters a pervasive sense of uncertainty, as victims cannot predict the perpetrator's next move, amplifying their dread. The emotional toll lingers long after the initial event, seeping into daily life and eroding their mental well-being. The participant's experience reflects the far-reaching impact of cyberbullying, which not only harms victims in the moment but also leaves enduring scars that can hinder their ability to trust or feel secure online.

Some other participants shared:

I felt betrayed, frustrated, and disappointed. All my money and gaming progress, gone. It meant I had to start all over again, solo before finding another group. The worst part

was thinking I had friends on the group, but no one stood up for me; they just went along with it (Male, 19, YR13).

This was further elaborated by a female respondent who felt anxious and wanted to stop using social media in general;

I felt shaken, anxious and scared. I didn't know how to make it stop. I didn't like being the target of twitter attacks. I started questioning deleting my account or just ghosting on social media from that time on (Female, 23years, 300L).

In this instance, the emotional distress is intensified by a dual loss: not only is there the tangible loss of assets, such as money or progress within a group, but also the profound realization of social betrayal. The participant's sense of being let down by those they considered friends magnifies the emotional toll, as the absence of support from their peers adds a relational dimension to the hardship. This compounded impact fosters a deeper sense of frustration, as the victim feels not only deprived but also abandoned. The feeling of being isolated in a situation where they should have had solidarity or empathy from others intensifies the emotional pain, leaving the participant grappling with both the physical and emotional weight of the betrayal.

The psychological and emotional consequences of cyberbullying are profound, often causing a shift in how victims perceive themselves and their interactions with others, both online and offline. One participant explained that;

I started to believe what they were saying about me. It felt like I truly wasn't good enough, like I was disgusting because of my size. I began to skip meals without my parents knowing, exercise excessively till I became ill and couldn't even move again (Male, 18years, SHS2)

This was corroborated by a female participant indicating the long-term behavioural changes she begun to adopt;

I used to be outgoing and confident online, but after it happened, I was no longer myself. I avoided social media, privatised my account, felt anxious when I got new DMs from people I didn't know, just walking on eggshells online basically, because I was worried, I would be targeted again (Female, 19years, YR13).

It is important to note here that, the male participant's narration exemplifies how cyberbullying can distort self-perception, leading him to internalize the hurtful comments about his appearance. The belief that he was “disgusting” because of his size prompted dangerous behaviours, such as skipping meals and excessive exercise, which ultimately harmed his physical health. This illustrates how the emotional toll of cyberbullying can manifest in severe physical consequences, driven by a desperate attempt to conform to external, often unrealistic, standards imposed by online harassment. Similarly, the female participant's experience highlights a shift in her social behaviour. Once outgoing and confident, she became increasingly anxious and withdrawn, isolating herself from social media and others due to the fear of being targeted again. Her decision to privatize her account and avoid new interactions underscores how cyberbullying can induce a state of hypervigilance, where every new encounter online is met with dread. These narratives collectively reveal the long-term psychological impact of cyberbullying, which not only affects victims in the moment but also disrupts their overall sense of identity, safety, and well-being.

The gravity of cyberbullying's impact becomes evident when we consider its potential to drive individuals to the brink of self-destruction. A key informant's account highlights just how dire the situation can become, illustrating the severe emotional toll that persistent online harassment can inflict. He shared:

I remember one of the ladies that called that she was actually going to kill herself because she could not bear the words that the people on the group were saying to her and that they were all liars and haters. (Male, KI)

This chilling statement underscores the life-threatening consequences of cyberbullying, where the relentless emotional abuse and degradation felt by the victim culminate in thoughts of suicide. The informant's recollection reveals that for some victims, the onslaught of hurtful words and online attacks isn't just an isolated distress; it can trigger profound feelings of hopelessness and despair, which may lead them to contemplate drastic actions like self-harm or even suicide. This emphasizes that the effects of cyberbullying are not just psychological, but can have devastating, real-world consequences if left unaddressed. The emotional pain caused by being relentlessly targeted online can erode a person's sense of worth, and in extreme cases, it may feel insurmountable, pushing them to view suicide as their only escape.

The narratives consistently show that cyberbullying has severe health consequences for young people, affecting their emotional stability, mental health, and physical well-being. The experiences of anxiety, fear, and shame were compounded by behavioural changes like avoidance and hypervigilance, highlighting the long-lasting psychological impact. In extreme cases, cyberbullying led to harmful behaviours, including disordered eating, excessive exercise, or suicidal ideation.

These findings suggest a need for targeted mental health support for victims of cyberbullying. counselling services, awareness campaigns, and digital literacy programs could help equip young people with the tools to navigate and cope with such experiences. Additionally, interventions must prioritize addressing the root causes of cyberbullying to prevent its occurrence and safeguard youth mental and physical well-being.

4.2.2.2 Academic Impact

The overwhelming emotional toll of cyberbullying is not only evident in the physical and mental health of the victims but also in their academic lives. For many, the distress caused by online harassment leads to a dramatic drop in motivation and focus, directly affecting their performance and engagement in school. This was especially true for participants who found it difficult to concentrate on their studies or participate in school activities, as their minds were consumed by the shame and fear stemming from the cyberbullying.

One male participant, reflecting on the emotional toll of his experience, revealed:

Oh, school? I lost interest that time, I didn't want to go to classes because of her and her friends staring at me in class as though I did it. I know rumours would have even spread in our year. Why would I bother myself, even my assignments, I paid someone to do it for me that time, because it was really hard for me to focus. (Male, 25years, 300l)

Here, the participant's avoidance of school and reluctance to attend classes highlights how the fear of public judgment, especially from peers, can create an overwhelming sense of shame that interferes with academic responsibilities. This fear of being judged by classmates and teachers, coupled with the emotional strain, led him to disengage entirely from his studies, even resorting to outsourcing his assignments. His inability to concentrate further underscores the profound psychological impact cyberbullying can have on academic motivation.

Similarly, another participant described how her ability to focus was compromised:

I would sit in class and my mind would wander to the mean comments they left on my page; I could hardly focus on the classes I had that period and I saw it in my grades at

the end of the session. Even when I was studying at home, I'll just get distracted thinking about these horrible words. (Female, 23years, 300l)

In this instance, the participant highlights the pervasive nature of cyberbullying's impact—it doesn't just affect the victim in isolated moments but continues to disrupt their thoughts and actions long after the incident. The distractions caused by the hurtful words on her social media page ultimately resulted in lower grades, as she struggled to concentrate on her studies. Her account is a powerful example of how emotional turmoil spills over into academic life, leaving victims feeling mentally scattered and incapable of focusing on their educational goals.

Furthermore, the emotional distress from cyberbullying manifested in feelings of disgrace and a loss of self-worth, which in turn led to disengagement from academic pursuits. A female participant shared her experience:

I felt disgraced in school because even some of our teachers later got to find out what had happened and were looking at me someway after that. Oh, I knew that I would not become a prefect in the school, and I stopped stressing myself to get top grades. (Female, 17years, SHS3)

The participant's perception of being looked down upon by teachers and peers exacerbated her feelings of humiliation, leading her to withdraw from academic aspirations. The decision to stop striving for academic excellence, including giving up on the ambition of becoming a prefect, highlights the deep-rooted impact of cyberbullying on a student's confidence and sense of self-worth. This disengagement not only affects academic performance but also affects long-term motivation and career ambitions.

A similar sentiment was echoed by another male participant:

My grades dropped from As to Cs, and it took me a while to get back on track. It's frustrating because I know I am capable of more. The incident really messed with my

head and I started doubting myself and lost focus in class because I was anxious about what people were saying online. (Male, 18years, SHS2)

In this case, the participant's academic decline reflects the emotional toll of cyberbullying, which led to self-doubt and anxiety. The frustration of knowing that he was capable of better but being unable to perform due to the ongoing psychological distress is a stark representation of how cyberbullying can undermine a person's confidence and academic capabilities.

Lastly, another participant shared how his inability to concentrate affected his overall engagement in school:

I avoided school activities for a while, I was not motivated to do anything besides sleeping and crying, even in class, I could not concentrate, hence my grades suffered for it. (Male, 17years, YR12)

This account illustrates the total disengagement from school activities and academics, where the emotional distress from the cyberbullying incident led to a deep sense of apathy and a lack of motivation. The participant's avoidance of school and inability to concentrate on classes due to the emotional weight of the situation further emphasizes the devastating impact cyberbullying can have on students' academic lives.

The collected narratives provide a comprehensive view of how cyberbullying negatively impacts both the mental health and academic performance of victims. These accounts highlight that the emotional distress caused by cyberbullying, including anxiety, depression, and social isolation, leads to significant disengagement from academic life. Victims often struggle with concentration, which in turn affects their ability to retain information, solve problems, and perform well in school. The fear of judgment from peers and teachers, along with the constant stress of online harassment, further compounds the issue, making it difficult for students to focus on their studies. As a result, many participants reported a decline in academic

performance, with grades dropping and a noticeable lack of motivation to participate in school activities, including social events and extracurriculars. This emotional and cognitive burden creates a barrier to effective learning, hindering both immediate academic success and long-term educational development. Moreover, some victims became so overwhelmed that they opted to avoid school altogether, contributing to absenteeism. These interconnected challenges reveal how the psychological toll of cyberbullying extends far beyond emotional distress, leading to a complete disruption of the victim's academic engagement and overall educational experience.

4.2.2.3 Social Impact

The participants' accounts reveal a significant, multifaceted impact on their social relationships and personal trust following their experiences with cyberbullying. Trust, an essential component of any relationship, was notably damaged as many victims were left uncertain about who was behind the harassment, making it difficult for them to trust those around them. This lack of trust was especially damaging in close friendships and romantic relationships.

One male participant described how his friends, instead of supporting him, distanced themselves and allowed the rumours to take hold, saying;

I was very distraught because even my friends believed I could really be a debtor, instead of them to stand up for me or even ask me, they rather distanced themselves from me and would be staring at me in school. It just taught me not to fully think people knew me. (Male, 20years, 200L)

This betrayal, particularly from those he thought he could rely on, undermined his sense of belonging and deepened the emotional distress caused by the harassment. His loss of trust in others is a powerful example of how cyberbullying can erode foundational relationships, leaving the victim isolated and vulnerable.

Another participant shared how the impact extended to romantic relationships, noting,

My babe broke up with me because not only her image was tarnished, mine was too and she said she didn't know what to believe and she would not want to be in a relationship anymore. Even her friends that I was cool with before did not pick my calls when I was trying to get them to beg her for me. (Male, 25 years, 300L)

The strain on his relationship not only highlights the emotional toll of cyberbullying but also underscores how reputational damage can reach into personal and intimate spheres. When his ex-girlfriend and her friends distanced themselves, it illustrated how cyberbullying does not only affect the victim but can ripple outwards, damaging connections with those closest to them. This dissolution of personal relationships further compounded his social isolation, showing how deeply these incidents can influence not just the victim's immediate circle but also their broader social network.

The experience of social withdrawal and avoidance was another key theme expressed by participants, particularly when they were overwhelmed by insecurity and fear. One participant, explained;

I went from being this outgoing bubbly girl to being on my own. I stopped showing up for major school events, parties and hangouts I was commonly known to attend. You know when you're not sure who is watching you or seeking to do you harm again, the best thing was to avoid people and large gatherings. I felt insecure, scared and anxious in the midst of people. (Female, 24 years, 400L)

Her withdrawal from social events was rooted in a deep sense of fear and insecurity, feeling vulnerable to potential harassment and judgment. This fear led to avoidance of not just the bullies but the entire social scene, contributing to a profound sense of isolation. Her story

reflects how cyberbullying can distort a person's sense of safety, making them retreat into themselves and avoid interactions that once brought joy.

The broader social consequences of cyberbullying are starkly evident in these narratives. The emotional distress that stems from harassment impacts not only the victim's immediate psychological well-being but also disrupts their ability to maintain healthy relationships. The social isolation that follows can have long-term repercussions, diminishing the victim's social skills, trust, and empathy, which are vital for forming meaningful connections. In addition to emotional pain, the loss of friendships and romantic relationships represents a significant blow to the individual's social identity and support system. Furthermore, this disconnection can perpetuate a cycle of loneliness and further mental health issues, such as anxiety and depression, reinforcing the destructive nature of cyberbullying. The damage goes beyond just the immediate incident, as it leaves lasting scars on the victim's ability to interact and engage with others, creating a barrier to personal growth and social reintegration.

4.2.3 Objective 3: Strategies to cope with Cyberbullying

In dealing with the trauma of cyberbullying, participants described using a variety of coping strategies that can be categorized into technological, social support, and emotional, cognitive, and behavioural methods. The third objective of this study explores how these strategies were employed by victims to navigate the harrowing experience of being targeted online.

4.2.3.1 Technological Solution

One of the most common strategies employed by victims involved using technological tools provided by the platforms themselves. These included blocking the perpetrator, reporting abusive content, or even deleting accounts entirely. For some victims, these actions yielded a

sense of immediate relief, while others found these methods insufficient in fully resolving the issue.

For example, a 20-year-old male participant shared his experience of trying to tackle the situation:

I messaged the number that was spreading the lies to stop but didn't get any response. Then because it was an MTN number, I called the MTN office to find out who it was or if they could block the number, they said they would handle it but I don't know if they did. I created a counter BC (broadcast) that I shared to all my contacts to disregard the message they had gotten from that number about me being a debtor. (Male, 20 years, 200L)

This account highlights the challenge of effectively using service providers to combat online harassment. While the participant took the initiative to contact the telecom provider, he was left uncertain about the outcome, illustrating the potential ineffectiveness of such technological solutions. In addition, he created a counter-broadcast to reassure his contacts, indicating a proactive effort to control the narrative. However, this solution also had limitations, as it was a response aimed at an audience he could still reach, rather than addressing the harasser directly.

Similarly, another 17-year-old male participant opted to delete his account entirely:

I deleted my account because I couldn't just bear the messages that were coming in asking if it was true, asking who did it, if I was involved and all sort of annoying questions. At least, as I was not online, I didn't know what was going on in the platform and nobody could reach me (Male, 17years, YR12)

This strategy was employed as a way to escape the relentless barrage of harassment. By removing himself from the online platform, he created a sense of distance and control,

temporarily severing his connection to the source of distress. While this provided short-term relief, it also suggests a lack of long-term coping mechanisms, as deleting an account does not address the underlying emotional or psychological impacts of the cyberbullying.

However, for some, technological solutions were met with mixed results. An 18-year-old female participant reported:

I reported the page to Instagram and after some hours, my report was approved and they took the page down, only for a similar account to pop up in my dm for the same thing, with the same threats. (Female, 18 years, SHS3)

Her experience highlights the cyclical nature of cyberbullying. While the initial report led to the removal of the harmful account, the emergence of a new account with similar threats underscores the persistence of online harassment. It also reflects a broader issue with the effectiveness of reporting systems, while platforms may take down offensive content, they do not always prevent new forms of harassment from arising.

While many participants sought technological solutions, others took a more confrontational approach, choosing to directly engage with the perpetrators. A participant shared her experience:

They were harassing me on Twitter, you know how sexist men can be. I tried ignoring at first but it escalated and I decided to fight back. I gave them fire for fire, I responded to every of the comments on the page that were trolling me with insults. After a while it became very exhausting, but I was happy I gave them a taste of their own medicine. (300L).

This "fire for fire" approach, where victims retaliate by mirroring the aggressive behaviour of the bullies, can initially provide a sense of empowerment and control. However, it often leads to emotional exhaustion, as the participant later acknowledged: "After a while it became very

exhausting, but I was happy I gave them a taste of their own medicine." This coping strategy, while providing immediate emotional relief, may not be sustainable in the long term. It highlights the emotional toll of engaging in online confrontations and the potential for burnout in continuously defending oneself against persistent online harassment.

A Key Informant working in the field of cyberbullying interventions further elaborated on the coping mechanisms used by victims. The informant stated;

Many of them report by using the cyberbullying authority service. We collaborate with many external organizations such as the Psychology Association of Ghana and we refer the victims to them once the report is made and they need counselling. We also advise them to block the perpetrator to avoid repetition, and to desist from putting out personal information about themselves that can lead to such incidents. (Male, K1)

This participant helps shed light on the role of the Cybersecurity Authority and other external organizations that collaborate to assist victims. According to the informant, victims are often referred to counselling services once a report is made, and blocking the perpetrator is recommended as a preventive measure. This highlights the importance of not only technological interventions but also the need for psychological support in helping victims cope with the aftermath of cyberbullying.

Conclusively, technological solutions; such as blocking, reporting, and account deletion, play a crucial role in helping victims cope with cyberbullying. Platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter offer tools to combat harassment, but these tools alone are often insufficient in addressing the deeper emotional and psychological impacts. The role of the Cybersecurity Authority, though underutilized by many victims, presents a critical resource for those who are aware of it. However, as evidenced by the participants' stories, many individuals resort to more immediate and personal coping mechanisms, including direct confrontation with the

perpetrators, which can lead to temporary relief but may also exacerbate emotional distress. The findings underscore the importance of not only enhancing technological solutions but also providing adequate psychological support and education about available resources to ensure a comprehensive approach to dealing with cyberbullying.

4.2.3.2 Seeking Social Support

Social support emerged as a crucial coping strategy for victims of cyberbullying. Participants sought support from family, friends, teachers, mental health professionals, and online support groups. However, most participants preferred confiding in their friends rather than family members, suggesting that the nature of relationships significantly influenced victims' willingness to seek help. While some benefited from supportive and judgment-free environments, others were hesitant to reach out due to fear of stigma, labelling, or cultural norms that discourage vulnerability.

For the few participants who sought help from family members, the outcomes were generally positive. A 20-year-old male participant shared:

I told my family members who were at home with me because they know I can never do such. They helped in spreading the broadcast message on their statuses since we shared some similar contacts that had gotten the message about me being a debtor. (Male, 20 years, 200L)

From the narration, the role of trust and a supportive family dynamic in alleviating the emotional burden of cyberbullying is eminent. The participant's ability to confide in his family suggests an environment free of judgment, where his family believed in his innocence and actively worked to restore his reputation. Their collective effort in spreading the counter-message shows how family can act as a united front, offering both emotional and practical

support in times of crisis. Such trust and collaboration can play a pivotal role in empowering victims to confront and manage the situation effectively.

In contrast, other participants found it easier to confide in their friends rather than their families.

A 25-year-old male participant explained:

I told my friends immediately it happened; they were very supportive; we tried to trace the account together but didn't succeed. They even came to visit me to cheer me up. After we played games, they said we should go drink and forget about it. This was actually how I started drinking a lot, I never really used to fancy drinking, but now I know it helps get my mind of things. (Male, 25 years, 300L)

This response underscores the pivotal role friends play in providing immediate emotional relief and companionship during difficult times. However, it also highlights a potentially negative coping mechanism; alcohol consumption. While the friends' intent to distract and console the participant was well-meaning, their suggestion inadvertently introduced a harmful habit. This raises questions about the quality of social support offered by peers and whether such support, while comforting, could lead to unintended consequences.

Similarly, another participant, a 23-year-old female, described how her friends actively supported her online:

When I told my friends, they came online and told me to start deleting the mean comments while they replaced it with good ones. My comment section was like a battlefield. My friends also assisted me in reporting them. They didn't let me feel too bad. (Female, 23years, 300L)

This account demonstrates the proactive nature of social support from friends, who not only helped the victim mitigate the impact of cyberbullying but also took direct action to combat it. The metaphorical description of the comment section as a "battlefield" highlights the intensity

of the situation and the solidarity shown by her friends. By replacing mean comments with positive ones, the friends created a protective buffer, helping to counteract the negativity and restore the victim's self-esteem. Such actions emphasize the importance of a collective approach to combating online harassment.

A younger participant, a 17-year-old female, shared a more personal form of social support:

After it happened, my friend Anna became my rock. She listened attentively, validated my emotions, and always offered words of encouragement. Her unwavering support and non-judgemental attitude helped me process my feelings and regain confidence. Her presence reminded me I wasn't isolated. (Female, 16years, YR11)

This narrative highlights the therapeutic role of emotional validation and empathy in social support. Unlike the previous examples, which focused on action-oriented support, this participant benefited primarily from a friend's attentive listening and emotional encouragement. The friend's non-judgmental attitude provided a safe space for the participant to express her feelings and rebuild her self-esteem, underscoring the importance of emotional availability in fostering resilience among cyberbullying victims.

Despite the evident benefits of social support, cultural barriers such as stigma, labelling, and societal expectations often discourage participants from seeking help. Many participants expressed fear of being perceived as weak or overly sensitive, particularly by their families or peers. The toughen-up culture prevalent in many African societies normalizes bullying behaviours and stigmatizes vulnerability. This societal norm often silences victims and discourages them from reporting incidents or seeking external help. As a result, victims may internalize their pain, perpetuating feelings of isolation and helplessness.

4.2.3.3 Emotional, Cognitive and Behavioural Coping

For some participants, isolation and emotional withdrawal became primary coping mechanisms in dealing with the effects of cyberbullying. These individuals avoided social interactions, concealed their struggles, and distanced themselves from online platforms to mitigate the emotional toll. This behaviour underscores the deep sense of shame, helplessness, and vulnerability often experienced by victims.

A 26-year-old female participant shared her experience:

I had plans for the holiday with my friends but I couldn't tell my friends that I had been blackmailed and used all my money to bail myself out. I kept on lying to them, sometimes I'll say I'm ill, other times I have chores or cramps. I was mostly home alone that period and sometimes I will cry, other times I will find how to entertain myself so I don't think too much (Female, 26years, 300L)

This response highlights the extent to which victims may go to protect their social image and avoid judgment. The participant's choice to lie to her friends rather than disclose her situation reflects a fear of stigma and a lack of confidence in receiving non-judgmental support. The combination of isolation and distraction served as a coping mechanism, allowing her to process her emotions privately. However, the avoidance of addressing the core issue may have delayed emotional recovery and reinforced feelings of loneliness.

Another participant, a 17-year-old male, described his response to the cyberbullying incident;

I deleted my account because I couldn't just bear the messages that were coming in asking if it was true, asking who did it, if I was involved and all sort of annoying questions. At least, as I was not online, I didn't know what was going on in the platform and nobody could reach me (Male, 17years, YR12)

This narrative reveals a common strategy of disconnecting from the source of distress to regain a sense of control. By deleting his account, the participant shielded himself from further harassment and the triggering nature of unsolicited messages. While this approach offered immediate relief, it also underscores the emotional burden of constantly being subjected to invasive questions and judgments. His actions illustrate the psychological impact of cyberbullying, which can lead victims to abandon their digital presence entirely, often at the cost of severing beneficial online connections.

For some participants, the shame and emotional distress extended beyond the digital realm, affecting their physical and academic lives. A 23-year-old female participant narrated:

To me it's a shameful thing so I didn't even have the courage to tell anyone. I stayed in my hostel and cried a lot. I had missed some classes already because I could not even be answering stupid questions from anybody. The days I could not skip class; I would go late and leave immediately to avoid the stares and gossips. (Female, 23years, 400L)

This account underscores the pervasive nature of cyberbullying, where its effects spill over into daily life, disrupting academic routines and social interactions. The participant's fear of judgment and ridicule kept her isolated, preventing her from seeking support. Her withdrawal from classes and deliberate attempts to avoid social scrutiny highlight the interplay between shame and self-isolation. The avoidance of classes and interaction reflects the internalized stigma and the need to shield oneself from perceived or real judgment by others.

Isolation and withdrawal as coping mechanisms reflect the significant emotional burden that cyberbullying places on victims. These responses, though seemingly protective, can have long-term consequences, including prolonged emotional distress and disrupted social or academic development. Participants who isolated themselves often did so to avoid judgment, protect their privacy, or escape overwhelming feelings of shame and embarrassment.

However, this form of coping may also hinder recovery. Emotional withdrawal prevents victims from accessing social support, which research shows is crucial for overcoming the psychological impacts of bullying. Furthermore, disengagement from academic or social environments can exacerbate feelings of loneliness and alienation, leading to a cycle of negative emotions.

These findings highlight the importance of creating safe and supportive environments where victims feel encouraged to seek help without fear of judgment. Schools, families, and peer groups play a critical role in fostering such environments, emphasizing empathy, non-judgmental support, and open communication. By addressing the underlying stigma and normalizing vulnerability, society can empower victims to seek healthier coping mechanisms and reduce the adverse effects of cyberbullying.

4.2.4 Objective 4: Available Reporting Mechanisms

The issue of reporting cyberbullying often comes down to the awareness and willingness of victims to engage with available support systems. Many participants, when asked about the options they had, revealed that despite having several potential reporting mechanisms in place such as; the Cybersecurity Authority, school authorities, and in-app reporting features, most did not know about or use them effectively. This is evident in the comment of a 26-year-old female who admitted;

I didn't think there was anyone I could report to that could help me, I didn't even know there was a thing as cybersecurity authority, maybe they could have done something if I had called them. After I told my friend, things happened really fast and I acted out of fear when I saw more threats so I just paid them the money. (Female, 26years, 300L)

Her reflection reveals a common barrier: ignorance. Without awareness of the existence of institutions like the Cybersecurity Authority, victims remain unaware of the available resources, leaving them feeling isolated and helpless in the face of harassment.

Additionally, some participants explicitly mentioned the difficulties of turning to more familiar, traditional avenues for help, such as parents or friends. One 18-year-old male explained;

I could not report to my parents because they will ground me and seize my game console and I would not be able to do anything for the holiday, you know how parents are, my parents can be funny, so I decided to just keep it to myself. (Male, 18years, YR13)

This comment highlights the tension between seeking help from authority figures, who may not understand the gravity of cyberbullying, and the fear of punitive reactions. The need for privacy and the fear of further consequences makes reporting to parents seem unappealing. The idea of losing personal freedoms, such as access to gaming devices, further discourages the victim from seeking support.

The sense of embarrassment and fear of judgment also prevented victims from seeking help, as illustrated by the words of a 25-year-old male:

Honestly, reporting wasn't an option for me, because I felt embarrassed. I thought it would make me look weak or overdramatic. Growing up, I was taught to 'toughen up' and handle problems myself. I was also worried about there being a reaction from the people behind it. (Male, 25years)

This individual's hesitation speaks to a larger societal pressure that discourages vulnerability, especially among young men, who may feel that asking for help undermines their perceived strength or maturity. This cultural expectation of self-reliance often leads to victims internalizing their trauma instead of seeking external support. Such reluctance not only leaves

the victim to navigate the distress on their own but also perpetuates the stigma surrounding mental health and cyberbullying.

Another participant expressed doubts about the effectiveness of reporting mechanisms, particularly online platforms, saying;

I didn't report because I didn't think anyone would take it seriously. Twitters reporting process seemed complicated, and I doubt the action I like would have been taken. What if there was a backlash and my account was suspended? I also thought people will say I am overreacting. Looking back, I wish I had reported. (Female, 23years, 400L)

This quote underscores a prevalent concern about the efficiency and responsiveness of reporting systems. Even when reporting mechanisms are available, such as those on Twitter or other social media platforms, the complexity and perceived ineffectiveness of these systems deter victims from using them. The fear of backlash, such as having one's account suspended or being labelled as an overreactor, compounds this hesitation, ultimately silencing victims and leaving them vulnerable.

A key informant also highlighted the broader issue of awareness and education about reporting mechanisms. He pointed out;

Many of them don't report because it is not a face-to-face thing that you can go and react to, so they would rather ignore and move on with life. I also feel that education about cyberbullying is not well spread in terms of how and to whom to report. (Male, K1)

This statement reveals a fundamental issue: the lack of face-to-face interaction with the reporting process makes it harder for victims to trust and engage with it. Additionally, the informant emphasized the insufficient education on how to report cyberbullying, which only deepens the sense of helplessness among potential victims.

Taken together, these narratives and insights paint a picture of a system that is failing to adequately support cyberbullying victims. The combined issues of ignorance, embarrassment, and doubts about the effectiveness of reporting mechanisms create a barrier to help-seeking behaviours, leaving many victims to suffer in silence. The lack of education and awareness about available resources exacerbates the problem, suggesting that greater efforts are needed to inform and empower youth on how to protect themselves and seek support in the digital age.

4.3 Discussion of findings

The study's findings provide valuable insights into the experiences of cyberbullying victims, highlighting the forms, impact, coping strategies and reporting mechanisms available to youth who have experienced cyberbullying, in line with the objectives of the study. The following discussion will delve into the implications of these findings, if they align with existing literature and their significance.

4.3.1 Forms of cyberbullying experienced by youth

Cyberbullying among youth in the Ayawaso West Municipality presents itself in multiple forms. It ranges from outing, fraping, and denigration to trolling, stalking, and cyber-sexual harassment. These forms are not random occurrences. Rather, they follow predictable patterns tied to young people's daily digital routines. According to the Integrated Model of Victimization, victimization is most likely to occur where there is a convergence of motivated offenders, available targets, and a lack of effective guardianship. Digital platforms, such as WhatsApp, Snapchat, and Facebook, which are frequently accessed by Ghanaian youths, create such convergences by fostering constant visibility, accessibility, and unmonitored interactions.

The model suggests that habitual engagement in social media increases both exposure to and proximity with potential offenders. Youth who routinely post personal images or status updates heighten their visibility and vulnerability, thereby inviting attention or malicious responses. Studies in other contexts affirm this trend. Hinduja and Patchin (2013), for instance, found that adolescents who post photos online or share intimate content are more likely to be cyberbullied, especially on visual-based platforms. Similarly, Schultze-Krumbholz et al. (2015) found that routine posting and commenting behaviour predicted online victimization among German youth. These findings are in harmony with this study, where the most common form of abuse reported (outing, or the non-consensual sharing of private images) was experienced by 12 of the 20 participants, with a disproportionate impact on females.

The gendered nature of this victimization is an important finding. Among the 12 female participants in this study, eight experienced image-based abuse, confirming previous research that suggests females are more likely to suffer from forms of cyberbullying that involve social humiliation or sexual exploitation (Heiman & Olenik-Shemesh, 2013; Mishna et al., 2010). This gender pattern is not merely incidental but reflects deeper cultural scripts around female respectability, modesty, and shame. When intimate content is shared without consent, female victims face intensified reputational damage, often enduring harsher social consequences than their male counterparts. Such dynamics align with prior research in sub-Saharan Africa, where cultural stigma around female sexuality amplifies the psychological burden of such violations (Alabi, 2016).

Moreover, the anonymity afforded by many online platforms further empowers offenders, reducing the likelihood of retaliation or accountability. Participants in this study frequently reported being unable to identify their harassers. This perceived distance from consequences emboldens aggressors while simultaneously disempowering victims, as echoed in Moore et al. (2012), who argued that anonymity fosters a sense of impunity among cyberbullies. However,

anonymity is not always the norm. As Rice et al. (2015) caution, a significant portion of cyberbullying (over 65% in their study) was perpetrated by individuals known to the victim, often schoolmates or ex-friends. This duality was also seen in the current study, where some cases of outing were linked to ex-partners or classmates, highlighting how both strangers and known peers can weaponize digital platforms.

4.3.2 How Cyberbullying Affects Youth

The psychological, social, academic, and physical consequences of cyberbullying experienced by youth in Ayawaso West Municipality reflect not only individual trauma but broader socio-cultural dynamics that amplify harm. The Integrated Model of Victimization notes that victimization is shaped not only by situational exposure but also by how victims interpret, internalize, and respond to these experiences. In this study, participants revealed layered impacts, from emotional distress to social withdrawal and academic disengagement, which illustrate the compounding nature of online harassment.

Psychologically, all 20 participants reported experiencing some form of emotional disruption following their victimization. Descriptions included hypervigilance, anxiety, persistent sadness, and in some cases, suicidal ideas. The severity of these symptoms was particularly acute among female participants, eight of whom recounted suicidal thoughts after the non-consensual distribution of intimate images. These findings resonate with Yang et al. (2021), who found that cyber-sexual harassment significantly increases risks of depression and self-harm among adolescent girls. Similarly, Otchere et al. (2021), in their study of Ghanaian youth, reported widespread emotional distress linked to cyberbullying, particularly among those targeted with image-based abuse. The lasting emotional damage often stems not only from the event itself but from the perceived irreversibility of digital harm; once something is online, it cannot be easily taken back.

This subjective appraisal (how individuals evaluate the event and its implications) is a central mechanism in the IMV. Victims who feel helpless, ashamed, or exposed tend to experience deeper psychological wounds. As seen in this study, many participants internalized blame or imagined that peers were laughing at them, leading to intense self-consciousness. This perception aligns with Janoff-Bulman's (1992) "shattered assumptions" theory, which suggests that trauma arises when victims' core beliefs about the world (safety, fairness, trust) are disrupted. For these youth, the digital violation of trust (often by close acquaintances) fractured their sense of control and predictability, leading to depressive symptoms and chronic anxiety.

Socially, most participants described withdrawing from peer interactions. Sixteen participants avoided social gatherings, stopped responding to messages, or deactivated their accounts. This mirrors findings from Sourander et al. (2010), who noted that social isolation was one of the most consistent outcomes of cyberbullying. In Ghana, where communal belonging and peer relationships are central to adolescent identity, such withdrawal can be particularly damaging. Participants in the study often cited fear of ridicule or community judgment as reasons for isolating themselves. Fredstrom et al. (2011) similarly found that trust erosion was a key reason cyberbullying victims withdrew from social spaces, especially when perpetrators were once trusted friends or classmates.

Academically, eleven participants reported that their school performance suffered. Several indicated difficulty concentrating, skipping classes, or even avoiding school altogether. One participant recalled obsessively checking their phone during lessons to monitor what people were saying about them. These findings are consistent with research by Farhangpour et al. (2019) and Kowalski et al. (2014), who found that cyberbullying leads to reduced academic motivation, absenteeism, and even grade repetition. For many Ghanaian youth, academic performance is closely tied to familial expectations and future opportunity. Hence, the disruption of their educational journey introduces both personal and structural risks.

Physically, twelve participants reported sleep disturbances, changes in appetite, and chronic headaches, which are classic symptoms of prolonged stress. Such psychosomatic effects highlight how cyberbullying transcends emotional harm and affects the body. Schneider et al. (2012) identified similar patterns, where sustained exposure to cyberbullying was linked to physical complaints and poor health outcomes among adolescents. These bodily manifestations further confirm the pervasive and embodied nature of online trauma.

Embedded within these outcomes are gendered and cultural mediators that shape the intensity and interpretation of harm. In Ghanaian society, cultural expectations around resilience, gendered respectability, and shame play a crucial role in how youth process cyberbullying. Female participants expressed deep fear of reputational damage and social ostracism, especially when image-based abuse was involved. In contrast, male participants reported feeling pressured to remain stoic or dismissive, even when suffering internally. These internalized norms often prevent help-seeking and exacerbate mental health challenges. Mishna et al. (2010) and Alabi (2016) highlight similar cultural scripts in their work, noting that victims often silence themselves due to fear of being perceived as weak or dishonourable. Importantly, the Integrated Model of Victimization also highlights the role of guardianship, or the lack thereof, in moderating harm. Many participants in this study described the absence of adult support or formal interventions, which reinforced their sense of helplessness. Without trusted authority figures to validate their experiences or intervene meaningfully, youth are left to cope alone. This absence of institutional or familial response transforms a one-time violation into a long-lasting crisis, deepening emotional scars and delaying recovery.

4.3.3 Coping Strategies to Deal with Cyberbullying

Coping with cyberbullying is not a uniform experience. Young people's strategies to handle online victimisation are shaped by their perception of the incident, the resources available to them, and the broader social and cultural scripts that define what is considered appropriate behaviour. In this study, participants adopted a range of coping strategies that fell broadly into four categories: technical solutions, social coping, avoidance, and maladaptive behaviours. These reflect the ways youth attempt to navigate feelings of powerlessness, social judgment, and emotional turmoil.

A dominant coping strategy reported was the use of technical mechanisms, such as blocking the bully or reporting the account. Most participants said this was their first response because it was the most immediate and accessible tool. One participant explained, "I blocked them on WhatsApp and just stopped checking my messages", while another shared, "I reported it on Instagram, but I never got a reply." These actions often served to regain a sense of control over a digital space that had become threatening. These findings echo those of Orel et al. (2017), who noted that technical controls give victims short-term relief and a perception of agency, even when actual resolution is limited. Similarly, Machackova et al. (2013) found that such coping can restore psychological stability, though it rarely prevents further harassment.

The effectiveness of technical coping was often undermined by the limitations of the platforms themselves. In several cases, perpetrators returned with new accounts or continued the abuse through other channels. These recurring incidents diminished the victims' trust in these tools and often led them to abandon digital engagement altogether. This aligns with findings by Milosevic (2016) and Agbeko & Kwa-Aidoo (2018), who observed that reporting mechanisms on social media platforms are inconsistent and lack timely enforcement, reducing their

deterrent effect. These accounts show that while technical responses may offer initial relief, they are not substitutes for deeper systemic or relational support.

Beyond platform-based solutions, social coping (particularly confiding in peers) emerged as the most psychologically meaningful strategy for many participants. Eighteen of the twenty participants mentioned speaking to a friend or a peer at some point. Friends were often perceived as non-judgmental and understanding. As one youth put it, “My friend helped me stay calm. She told me it wasn’t my fault.” These peer-to-peer interactions were not only emotionally validating but also helped victims make sense of the incident and resist internalising blame. This reflects the findings of Chan & Wong (2017) and Holt & Espelage (2007), who demonstrated that peer support, particularly among adolescents, is associated with better emotional outcomes following cyberbullying.

However, this reliance on peers also signals a deeper gap in institutional or adult support. Only one participant reported confiding in a parent, and none engaged school authorities. Reasons for this included fear of being blamed, losing device privileges, or being shamed for “inviting” the abuse. These responses are shaped by cultural expectations that youth must be resilient or discreet about matters involving sexuality or public embarrassment. In many Ghanaian homes, conversations around digital safety are minimal, and victims often fear worsening their situation by speaking up. Cassidy et al. (2013) noted similar dynamics in Canadian adolescents, where fear of adult reaction led to secrecy, but the cultural layer in Ghana intensifies this silence.

Avoidance was another frequently reported strategy. Several participants deleted their accounts, stopped using their phones, or completely withdrew from digital spaces. One participant stated, “I didn’t want to see anything, so I just left the group and stopped going online.” This form of passive coping helped reduce immediate anxiety but came at the cost of

social disconnection and increased isolation. Heiman et al. (2019) refer to this as a “short-term escape” strategy, which offers momentary comfort but can reinforce a sense of defeat if not coupled with emotional processing or external support.

A particularly concerning finding was the use of maladaptive coping, especially among male participants, who reported using alcohol to numb emotional pain. One male student said, “My boys gave me bitters. It helped me sleep that night.” While only a minority (3 of 8 male participants) disclosed such behaviour, the fact that substance use was normalized among peer groups is significant. It suggests that gendered scripts around toughness and emotional suppression push boys toward unhealthy outlets. These behaviours align with Cénat et al. (2018) and Machackova et al. (2013), who found that male victims of cyberbullying are more likely to externalise distress through substance use or aggression, rather than seek support.

What becomes clear is that coping strategies are not just psychological responses. They are shaped by the interaction between individual perceptions, cultural messages, and systemic support, or lack thereof. Many young persons in this study were navigating harm in social environments where vulnerability is stigmatised, adult intervention is distrusted, and institutional safeguards are either weak or non-existent. These conditions restrict the range of positive coping options available and often force youth to rely on strategies that offer temporary relief rather than long-term resolution.



4.3.4 Available Reporting Mechanisms

While digital platforms provide technical avenues for reporting abuse, the study found that youth engagement with formal reporting mechanisms (both online and offline) was low,

inconsistent, and largely ineffective. Most participants were aware of basic platform features like blocking or reporting, but very few trusted these tools to offer genuine protection. The lack of follow-through by platforms, cultural stigmas around disclosure, and the fear of reprisal or dismissal were powerful deterrents. These patterns reflect not just individual decisions, but a broader failure of systems meant to protect vulnerable users.

Among the twenty-youth interviewed, only a handful reported using in-app tools such as Facebook's "report" button or WhatsApp's "block" feature. Even when used, participants expressed frustration that their complaints were either ignored or led to no visible resolution. Several mentioned that harmful posts or messages remained up even after being flagged. One participant stated, "I reported the post twice, but it was still there. Then they created another account." This aligns with findings from Agbeko and Kwa-Aidoo (2018) in Ghana and Livingstone et al. (2011) in Europe, both of which observed a high level of dissatisfaction with platform responsiveness. The IMV's guardianship dimension is particularly relevant here: while digital platforms are technically "guardians," they often fail in their protective role, leaving youth to navigate these violations alone.

More troubling is the lack of awareness and engagement with national structures like the Ghana Cybersecurity Authority. When asked about formal reporting procedures, most participants were unfamiliar with such institutions. Even those who had heard of the Cybersecurity Authority did not know how to contact them or doubted they would be taken seriously. This reflects significant gaps in digital literacy and civic education. Youth not only lack information about reporting mechanisms but also feel alienated from systems that seem bureaucratic, unresponsive, or stigmatizing. The subjective appraisal component of the IMV model helps explain this pattern: if a victim believes that a reporting channel is futile or may even cause further harm, they are unlikely to engage with it.

Equally important are the cultural scripts and social dynamics that discourage reporting. Most participants did not inform parents, teachers, or school administrators about their experience. Female participants feared shame, blame, or reputational damage, especially in cases involving the non-consensual distribution of intimate images. One participant remarked, “If my mum found out, I wouldn’t have a phone again. They’ll think it’s my fault.” This fear is not unfounded; studies like Parris et al. (2012) and Cassidy et al. (2013) document similar fears among youth in North America, but these concerns are often intensified in collectivist contexts like Ghana, where family honour and social image are deeply intertwined. The emotional cost of disclosure, then, becomes too high; victims are caught between the need for help and the fear of punishment or stigma.

Interestingly, while school authorities were sometimes viewed as more approachable than family, they were not perceived as particularly effective. Some participants recalled vague school announcements about “appropriate behaviour online,” but none reported the presence of structured policies or dedicated staff to handle cyberbullying cases. The absence of school-based reporting protocols aligns with Hartzler (2021), who found that even when schools acknowledge cyberbullying, most lack a proactive or student-centred response plan. Without clear institutional guardianship, students are left to navigate these harms with limited support, contributing to the chronic underreporting of cyberbullying in Ghana.

Furthermore, there was a disconnect between perceived and actual reporting behaviours. While participants claimed to be unaware of or hesitant toward reporting options, some still engaged in informal reporting, telling a friend, asking peers to intervene, or seeking comfort in social groups. This form of “horizontal” reporting reflects a survival strategy, where youth rely on informal networks in the absence of trusted formal channels. These behaviours are supported

by Dredge et al. (2014), who found that informal peer-based reporting is often the first and only step for cyberbullying victims. The IMV's emphasis on environmental context and subjective evaluation supports this finding: young people weigh the emotional and social risks of reporting and often choose the path of least resistance, even if it means sacrificing justice or resolution.

Taken together, these findings paint a picture of institutional neglect, digital inefficiency, and cultural silence. The absence of clear, confidential, and youth-friendly reporting structures deepens the psychological impact of cyberbullying and prevents early intervention. For young victims, the lack of trusted guardianship, whether technological, familial, or institutional, becomes a second form of victimisation, reinforcing the belief that help is neither accessible nor safe. The emotional labour of self-protection thus falls squarely on the victim, perpetuating cycles of distress, silence, and withdrawal.

Policy implications are significant. There is a need for robust digital literacy programs that include not just safe internet use but also concrete pathways for reporting abuse. Schools should adopt specific, youth-driven protocols to handle digital harassment, including anonymous complaint mechanisms and trained personnel. National structures like the Cybersecurity Authority must also improve outreach and accessibility, ensuring their services are known, trusted, and responsive. Without these shifts, the structural barriers to reporting will continue to outweigh the perceived benefits, leaving Ghanaian youth vulnerable and unsupported in the face of growing digital threats.



CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.0 Introduction

This final chapter provides a comprehensive summary of the key findings presented in the previous chapter on the experiences of youth with cyberbullying in Ayawaso-West Municipality. The chapter then synthesizes the findings to draw conclusions about the research questions and objectives, highlighting the contributions of the study to the existing body of knowledge. Finally, this chapter provides recommendations for policymakers, practitioners and future researchers, based on the insights gained from the study.

5.1 Summary of Findings

The study on cyberbullying experiences of youth in Ayawaso-West Municipality delved into the lived experiences of the victims of cyberbullying, shedding light on how they were affected and how they coped with the incidents of cyberbullying. Young persons in Ayawaso-West Municipality experience the various forms of cyberbullying that exist with the most prevalent from the study being outing (posting private personal images or communication) on various social networking sites and anonymity playing a major role in perpetration of the act. Findings also revealed that there is still a lack of awareness of the cyberbullying phenomenon, as most of the victims did not know that what they experienced at the time was cyberbullying. Females were also more likely to face harassment related to their private videos or photos being distributed online without their consent than their male counterparts.

Cyberbullying affects youths negatively mentally, physically, emotionally and psychologically, academically and socially. These effects manifested in form of anxiety, social isolation, fear, shame, trust issues, embarrassment, withdrawals, alcohol and drug use,

absenteeism and in worse cases, drop out from school. Females were more likely to have suicidal thoughts than their male counterparts as they perceived the consequences of cyberbullying incident as more harmful, as they usually face cyber-sexual harassment which deeply erodes self-esteem and body image. Sociocultural expectations and gender norms amplify emotional distress and females also tend to internalise and ruminate on these hurtful incidents, exacerbating depression and anxiety.

The study also found that senior high school students experienced more of peer-to-peer cyberbullying, as they were more likely to be influenced by their social circles in schools, while university students experienced more online harassment from strangers or acquaintances, as they are more likely to engage in online discussions and debates. Also, some of the senior high school participants perceived the incident as more severe and damaging as opposed to some university students who perceived it as less severe, as they had developed more coping mechanisms and were already desensitised to online harassment. Also worthy of note is the observation that senior high school participants were quick to blame themselves and believed they should have been more careful online as opposed to the participants in university who placed more responsibility on the perpetrator for the incident.

Young people adopt several ways to cope with the issue of cyberbullying. Technological solutions are observed to be the first option employed by youth to handle cyberbullying incidents which usually involve blocking, reporting or even deleting one's account, and many platforms provide opportunity for users to report perceived threats and suspicious behaviours from other users. Young people seek social support mostly from friends because parents cannot be trusted to handle the situation. In most cases, their friends made them feel secure and helped them deal with the situation. Some young people also employ an avoidance strategy where they ignore the bully or avoid thoughts about the incident by deleting their accounts or going offline.

Males were often lured into alcohol/drug use by peers. Other youth victims also adopt aggressive strategies by responding to the bully but only when they knew who was behind it.

Parents and school authority are not seen as reliable authorities to report to as young people feel they wouldn't be able to handle the situation or might make matters worse due to their lack of knowledge on cyber related matters. Most young people did not also report incidents of cyberbullying due to ignorance as to where and whom to report to, as well as feelings of shame and embarrassment. The youth were ignorant about the cybersecurity authority and how it could have played a role in mitigating cyberbullying issues. Young persons who have experienced cyberbullying in the presence of others wished cyber-bystanders could have done more for them.

5.2 Conclusions

The study concludes that young persons in Ayawaso-West Municipality are not exempt from the different forms of cyberbullying that exist and are faced by young persons worldwide, where anonymity also plays a big role, underscoring the need for increased awareness and intervention strategies to address the phenomenon. There is still a knowledge gap about the phenomenon of cyberbullying as many are unaware, they experience it, which highlights the need for increased awareness and education regarding the signs of such harmful behaviour.

The study concludes that the effects of cyberbullying are negative and detrimental to the health and life of young persons, making it a phenomenon that needs to be paid attention to. Youths are affected negatively mentally, physically, emotionally and psychologically, academically and socially.

Young persons in Ayawaso-West Municipality employ various successful coping strategies which are useful in dealing with cyberbullying incidents and its effects. Understanding these diverse responses is crucial for developing effective interventions to support affected youth.

A significant number of youths refrain from reporting cyberbullying incidents primarily due to a lack of awareness regarding reporting channels and feelings of shame. Parents and school authority cannot offer the needed support young people need to deal with cyberbullying, which underscores the need for improved communication channels to empower youth in reporting such incidents. There is a desire for greater intervention and support from cyber-bystanders as they play a role in addressing and mitigating the effects of online harassment.

5.3 Recommendations

The study indicates the fact that youth experience the various forms of cyberbullying on different social networking sites, but are unaware of it. As the internet is growing, the rate of cybercrime will also increase, thus all stakeholders must collaborate and work together to curb the harmful act by increasing awareness to close the knowledge gap and develop intervention strategies to address the phenomenon. These stakeholders include school counsellors, the Cybersecurity Authority, parents, social workers and the Ministry of Education.

More importantly, the study found that cyberbullying has negative and detrimental effects on youths. It is recommended that educating young people on cyber safety behaviours, social skills, legal consequences of cyberbullying perpetration and conflict management to reduce their susceptibility to being targets of cyberbullying, as well as decrease online aggression will be useful in addressing and managing cyberbullying.

Cyberbystanders who are witnesses of cyberbullying incidents can play the role of defending and protecting victims from being further harassed which can in turn alleviate the intended harm. Children and youth should therefore be encouraged by parents and teachers to speak up in situations where others are being bullied.

Finally, youths refrain from reporting cyberbullying incidents primarily due to a lack of awareness regarding reporting channels and feelings of shame and inability to rely on parents and school authorities. There is a need for improved communication channels by school authorities and parents to foster a safe reporting environment for young persons. Every school should have robust cyberbullying policies that can assist in managing cyberbullying incidents.

5.4 Implications for Social Work

The findings of the study point to cyberbullying as a novel form of bullying that is growing. According to the NASW, social workers are urged to be competent and advance their knowledge in their field of specialization. Therefore, social workers especially in schools must be aware, educated and adequately prepared to ensure their adaptation and safe and effective provision of service in a world which is complicated and changing.

School authorities and parents are perceived as unable to deal with cyberbullying, indicating the need for social workers and the Cybersecurity Authority to collaborate in providing training and workshops for teachers, parents and staff on recognising signs, responding effectively, and promoting digital citizenship.

There is still a lack of knowledge of the cyberbullying phenomenon in Ghana. Social workers can join non-governmental organisations in raising awareness in communities on prevention

and management strategies, as well as develop response protocols for cyberbullying incidents, ensuring timely support for victims.

Many schools do not have policies against cyberbullying. Social workers play a vital role in advocating for comprehensive cyberbullying policies in schools. This would require collaboration with educators, administrators and parents to develop policies addressing cyberbullying prevention, reporting and response. School social workers can also facilitate student-led initiatives, empowering young people to take ownership of their online safety.

Several gaps exist in the Ghanaian context of cyberbullying. Social work researchers can research on the gaps that prove insightful like the prevalence of cyberbullying in Ghana, cyberbullying behaviour acceptance and culturally specific dimensions of cyberbullying in Ghana.



REFERENCES

- Agbeko, M. and Kwaa-Aidoo, E., K. (2018). An exploration of the cyber bullying phenomenon among teenagers in Southern Ghana. *African Journal of Applied Research*, 4(2), 119-129.
- Alotaibi, N.B. (2019). Cyber bullying and the expected consequences on the students' academic achievement. *IEEE Access*, 7, 153417-153431.
- Alwalqa (2021). Cyberbullying, social stigma, and self-esteem: the impact of COVID-19 on students from East and Southeast Asia at the University of Jordan. *Heliyon*, 7 (4), e06711 <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.heliyon.2021.e06711>
- Alzahrani, H. (2015). Examining the effectiveness of utilizing mobile technology in vocabulary development for language learners. *Arab World English Journal*, 6. 108-119. <https://doi.org/10.24093/awej/vol6no3.7>.
- American Psychological Association. (2015). Definition of victim. Retrieved from <https://dictionary.apa.org/victim>
- Antiri, K.O. (2016). Types of Bullying in the Senior High Schools in Ghana. *Journal of Education and Practice*, 7, 131-138.
- Cénat, J., Hébert, M., Blais, M., Lavoie, F., Guerrier, M., & Derivois, D. (2014). Cyberbullying, psychological distress and self-esteem among youth in Quebec Schools. *Journal of Affective Disorders*. 169. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jad.2014.07.019>.
- Chan, H. C., & Wong, D. S. W. (2017). Coping with cyberbullying victimization: An exploratory study of Chinese adolescents in Hong Kong. *International Journal of Law, Crime and Justice*, 50, 71-82. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijlcrj.2017.04.003>

- Cilliers, J. (2021). The Future of Africa: Challenges and Opportunities. 10.1007/978-3-030-46590-2.
- Creswell, J. and Plano Clark, V. (2011). *Designing and conducting mixed method research*. 2nd Age; Thousand Oaks, CA.
- Creswell, J.W. (2013). *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*. (4th Ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Cossham, A., & Johanson, G. (2019). The benefits and limitations of using key informants in library and information studies research. *Information Research*, 24(3). <http://informationr.net/ir/24-3/raills/raills1805.html>
- Cross, D., Lester, L., & Barnes, A. (2015). A longitudinal study of the social and emotional predictors and consequences of cyber and traditional bullying victimisation. *International Journal of Public Health*. 60. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00038-015-0655-1>.
- Cyber Security Authority. (2022). COP advisories. <https://csa.gov.gh/cyberbullying.php>
- Daneback, K., Ylva, B., Machackova, H., Sevcikova, A., & Dedkova, L. (2018). Bullied online but not telling anyone. What are the reasons for not disclosing cybervictimization? *Studia Paedagogica*, 23(4), 119-28. <https://doi.org/10.5817/SP2018-4-6>
- De', R., Pandey, N., & Pal, A. (2020). Impact of digital surge during Covid-19 pandemic: A viewpoint on research and practice. *International journal of information management*, 55, 102171. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijinfomgt.2020.102171>
- Etikan, I., Musa, S. A., & Alkassim, R. S. (2016). Comparison of convenience sampling and purposive sampling. *American Journal of Theoretical and Applied Statistics*, 5, 1-4. <https://doi.org/10.11648/j.ajtas.20160501.11>

- Farhangpour, P., Maluleke, C. & Mutshaeni, H.N. (2019). Emotional and academic effects of cyberbullying on students in a rural high school in the Limpopo province, South Africa. *South African Journal of Information Management*, 21(1), a925. <https://doi.org/10.4102/sajim.v21i1.925C>
- Faucher, C., Jackson, M., & Cassidy, W. (2014). Cyberbullying among university students: gendered experiences, impacts, and perspectives. *Education Research International*. <https://doi.org/10.1155/2014/698545>.
- Fohring, S. (2012). *The process of victimisation: Investigating risk, reporting and service use*. (Unpublished Doctoral dissertation). School of Law, The University of Edinburgh.
- Fohring, Stephanie. (2014). An integrated model of victimization as an explanation of non-involvement with the criminal justice system. *International Review of Victimology*, 21. 45-70. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0269758014547993>
- Fredstrom, B., Adams R., & Gilman R. (2011). Electronic and school-based victimization: unique contexts for adjustment difficulties during adolescence. *Journal of Youth Adolescents*, 40(4):405–415
- Frisén, A., Berne, S., & Lunde, C. (2014). Cybervictimization and body esteem: Experiences of Swedish children and adolescents. *Developmental Psychology*. 11. 331-343. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17405629.2013.825604>.
- Ghansah, Benjamin. (2022). The impact of cyber bullying on the youth: The Ghanaian perspective. *International Journal of Computer Applications*. 183. 38-45. <https://doi.org/10.5120/ijca2022921889>
- Gualdo, A. M. G., Hunter, S. C., Durkin, K., Arnaiz, P., & Maquilon, J. J. (2015). The emotional impact of cyberbullying; Differences in perceptions and experiences as a function

- of role. *Computers & Education*, 82, 228-235.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.compedu.2014.11.013>
- Hartzler, H. (2021). *"The Issue of Cyberbullying: A Literature Review"*. Williams Honors College, Honors Research Projects. 1250.
https://ideaexchange.uakron.edu/honors_research_projects/1250
- Heiman, T., Dorit, O., & Gali, F. (2019). Patterns of coping with cyberbullying: Emotional, behavioral, and strategic coping reactions among middle school students. *Violence and Victims*, 34, 28-45. <https://doi.org/10.1891/0886-6708.34.1.28>.
- Hellfeldt, K., López-Romero, L., & Andershed, H. (2019). Cyberbullying and psychological well-being in young adolescence: The potential protective mediation effects of social support from family, friends, and teachers. *International journal of environmental research and public health*, 17(1), 45. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph17010045>
- Hinduja, S., & Patchin, P. (2010). Bullying, cyberbullying, and suicide. *Archives of Suicide Research*, 14(3), 206-221, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13811118.2010.494133>
- Holfeld, B., & Grabe, M. (2012). Middle School Students' Perceptions of and Responses to Cyber Bullying. *Journal of Educational Computing Research*, 46(4), 395-413.
<https://doi.org/10.2190/EC.46.4.e>
- Holt, M., & Espelage, D. (2007). Perceived social support among bullies, victims and bully-victims. *Journal of Youth & Adolescence*, 36, 984-994. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s10964-006-9153-3>
- Jacobs, N., Goossens, L., Dehue, F., Völlink, T., & Lechner, L. (2015). Dutch cyberbullying victims' experiences, perceptions, attitudes and motivations related to (coping with)

- cyberbullying: Focus group interviews. *Societies*, 5(1), 43–64.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.3390/soc5010043>
- Janoff-Bulman, R. (1992). *Shattered Assumptions: Towards a New Psychology of Trauma*. New York: The Free Press.
- Janoff-Bulman, R., & Frieze, I. (1983). A theoretical perspective for understanding reactions to victimization. *Journal of Social Issues* 39(2), 1–17.
- Kandlapalli, N., Shinde, S., Shriramoji, P., Uke, P., & Chaudhary, S. (2017). Defending mechanism for cyber bullying. *International Journal of Scientific Research in Computer Science, Engineering and Information Technology*, 2(2), 716-719.
- Khine A., Saw Y., Htut Z., Khaing C., & Soe H. (2020). Assessing risk factors and impact of cyberbullying victimization among university students in Myanmar: A cross-sectional study. *PloS One* 15(1): e0227051. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0227051>
- Kirchherr, J., & Charles, K. (2018). Enhancing the sample diversity of snowball samples: Recommendations from a research project on anti-dam movements in Southeast Asia. *PloS One*, 13(8), e0201710. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0201710>
- Kowalski, R. M., Dillon, E., Macbeth, J., Franchi, M., & Bush, M. (2020). Racial differences in cyberbullying from the perspective of victims and perpetrators. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 90(5), 644–652. <https://doi.org/10.1037/ort0000492>
- Kowalski, R., Giumetti, G., Schroeder, A., & Lattanner, M. (2014). Bullying in the digital age: a critical review and meta-analysis of cyberbullying research among youth. *Psychological Bulletin*, 140(4), 1073-137. <http://doi.org/10.1037/a0035618>

- Kwode, P., Dery, D., & Abudu, J. (2020). Effects of cyberbullying among tertiary students in Ghana: A study of two universities in the Northern Region. *International Journal of Innovative Research and Knowledge*, 5(2), 87-95.
- Lerner, M. (1980). *The Belief in a Just World: A Fundamental Delusion. Perspectives in Social Psychology*. New York: Plenum Press.
- Lewis, S. (2015). Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches. *Health Promotion Practice*, 16(4), 473-475.
- Li, J., Wu, Y., & Hesketh, T. (2023). Internet use and cyberbullying: Impacts on psychosocial and psychosomatic wellbeing among Chinese adolescents. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 138. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2022.107461>.
- Machmutow, K., Perren, S., Sticca, S., & Alsaker, F. (2012). Peer victimisation and depressive symptoms: can specific coping strategies buffer the negative impact of cyber victimisation? *Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties*, 17(3-4), 403-420, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13632752.2012.704310>
- Maurya, C., Muhammad, T., Dhillon, P. (2022). The effects of cyberbullying victimization on depression and suicidal ideation among adolescents and young adults: a three-year cohort study from India. *BMC Psychiatry* 22, 599. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12888-022-04238-x>
- McDool, E., Powell, P., Roberts, J., & Taylor, K. (2020). The internet and children's psychological wellbeing. *Journal of Health Economics*, 69, 102274. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jhealeco.2019.102274>
- Milosevic, T. (2016). Social media companies' cyberbullying services. *International Journal of Communication*, 10, 5164-5185

- Mukred, M., Mokhtar, U., Moafa, F., Gumaei, A., Sadiq, A., & Al-Othmani, A. (2024). The roots of digital aggression: Exploring cyber-violence through a systematic literature review, *International Journal of Information Management Data Insights*, 4(2). <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2667096824000703>)
- Navarro, J. (2022). Laying the Foundation for Protective Digital Parenting: The Development of a Theoretical Framework, a Validated Measure of Digital Parenting Attitudes, and a Person-Centered Analysis of Digital Parenting Styles.
- Nazarov, V., & Averbukh, N. (2024). The Frequency of Open and Anonymous Cyberbullying Among School Students. 193-211. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-50609-3_15.
- Ngo, A., Tran, A., Tran, X., Nguyen, H., Hoang, T., Nguyen, T., Doan, P., Vu, G., Nguyen, T., Do, H., Latkin, C., HO, R., & Ho C. (2021). Cyberbullying among school adolescents in an urban setting of a developing country: experience, coping strategies, and mediating effects of different support on psychological well-being. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 12, 661919 <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.661919><eywords:
- Nikolaou, D. (2022). Bullying, cyberbullying, and youth health behaviours. *Kyklos*, 75(1), 75–105. <https://doi.org/10.1111/kykl.12286>
- Oblad, T. (2021). A holistic overview of cyberbullying across the world: Review of theories and models. *Anxiety Disorders - The New Achievements*. <https://doi.org/10.5772/intechopen.91433>
- Onukwuli, V., Enebe, N., Udigwe, I., Umeh, U., Enebe, J., & Umerah, A. (2023). *Internet addiction during the COVID-19 pandemic among adolescents in southeast Nigeria and implications for adolescent care in the post-pandemic era: A cross-sectional study*. SAGE Open Medicine. 11. 205031212311527. <https://doi.org/10.1177/20503121231152763>.

- Orel, A., Campbell, M., Wozencroft, k., Leong, E., & Kimpton, M. (2017). Exploring university students' coping strategy intentions for cyberbullying. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 32(3), 446–462. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0886260515586363>
- Otchere Y., Primo, E., & Sarfo, J. (2021). Exploring cyberbullying and its implications on psychosocial health of students in Accra, Ghana: A thematic analysis. *European Journal of Contemporary Education*, 10(4) <https://doi.org/10.13187/ejced.2021.4.981>
- Perren, S., & Gutzwiller-Helfenfinger, E. (2012). Cyberbullying and traditional bullying in adolescence: Differential roles of moral disengagement, moral emotions, and moral values. *European Journal of Developmental Psychology*, 9(2), 195–209. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17405629.2011.643168>
- Rice, E., Petering, R., Rhoades, H., Winetrobe, H., Goldbach, J., Plant, A., Montoya, J., & Kordic, T. (2015). Cyberbullying perpetration and victimization among middle-school students. *American Journal of Public Health*, 105(3), e66–e72. <https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.2014.302393>
- Sam, D., Bruce, D., Agyemang, C., Amponsah, B., & Arkorful, H. (2018). Cyberbullying victimization among high school and university students in Ghana. *Deviant Behaviour*, 40. 1-17. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01639625.2018.1493369>
- Sanders, C. (2019). Breakfast skipping, psychological distress, and involvement in bullying: is there a connection? *International Journal of Bullying Prevention*, 1:147–157. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s42380-019-00008-8>
- Schneider, S., O'Donnell, L., Stueve, A., & Coulter, R. (2012). Cyberbullying, school bullying, and psychological distress: a regional census of high school students. *American Journal of Public Health*, 102(1), 171–177. <https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.2011.300308>

- Sidanius, J., Pratto, F., & Rabinowitz, J. (1944). Gender, ethnic status, and ideological asymmetry: Social dominance interpretation. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, 25, 194-216.
- Sittichai, R. & Smith, P. (2018). Bullying and cyberbullying in Thailand: Coping strategies and relation to age, gender, religion and victim status. *Journal of New Approaches in Educational Research*, 7. 24-30. <https://doi.org/10.7821/naer.2018.1.254>
- Šléglová, V., & Cerna, A. (2011). Cyberbullying in adolescent victims: perception and coping. *Cyberpsychology: Journal of Psychosocial Research on Cyberspace*, 5(2), Article 4. <https://cyberpsychology.eu/article/view/4248>
- Sourander, A., Brunstein Komek, A., Ikonen M. (2010) Psychosocial risk factors associated with cyberbullying among adolescents: a population-based study. *Arch Gen Psychiatry*. 67(7):720–728.
- Taylor, S., Wood, J., & Lichtman, R. (1983). It could be worse: selective evaluation as a response to victimization. *Journal of Social Issues*, 39(2): 19–40.
- Tetteh, A., Awaah, F., & Addo, D. (2022) Perception of cyberbullying among students: the study of a developing country. *Journal of Aggression, Conflict and Peace Research*.
- UNICEF. (2019). UNICEF poll: More than a third of young people in 30 countries report being a victim of online bullying. Retrieved from <https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/unicef-poll-more-third-young-people-30-countries-report-being-victim-online-bullying>
- United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, General Assembly 44/25, Annex, UN, GAPR Sup. (No. 49) at 167, UN. Doc A/44/49. New York: UN Information Department.
- Van Dijk, J. (2009). Free the victim: A critique of the western conception of victimhood. *International Review of Victimology*, 16(1): 1–33.

- Volk, A., Dane, A., & Marini, Z. (2014). What is bullying? A theoretical redefinition. *Developmental Review*, 34(4). <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.dr.2014.09.001>
- Völlink, T., Bolman, C., Dehue, F., & Jacobs, N. (2013). Coping with cyberbullying: differences between victims, bully-victims and children not involved in bullying. *Journal of Community and Applied Social Psychology*, 23(1), 7-24. <https://doi.org/10.1002/casp.2142>
- Webber, M. A., & Ovedovitz, A. C. (2018). Cyberbullying among college students: a look at its prevalence at a u.s. catholic university. *International Journal of Educational Methodology*, 4(2), 101-107. <https://doi.org/10.12973/ijem.4.2.101>
- Yaro, A. (2020). *Recognizing cyberbullying and its relationship with depression*. (Graduate Thesis). Ghana Institute of Journalism, Accra, Ghana.





APPENDIX 1



(ECH)

UNIVERSITY OF GHANA ETHICS COMMITTEE FOR THE HUMANITIES

P. O. Box LG 74, Legon, Accra, Ghana

My Ref. No: ECH 212/ 23-24

June 05, 2024

Oyesimisola Fagbenro
Department of Social Work
University of Ghana
Legon

ETHICAL CLEARANCE (ECH 212/ 23-24)

The Ethics Committee for the Humanities (ECH) conducted a full-board review and approved your protocol titled:

CYBERBULLYING: EXPLORING THE EXPERIENCES OF YOUNG PERSONS IN AYAWASO-WEST MUNICIPALITY

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: OYESIMISOLA FAGBENRO

Please note that the final review report must be submitted to the Committee at the completion of the study. Your research records may be audited at any time during or after the implementation. Any modification of this research project must be submitted to ECH for review and approval prior to implementation.

Please report all serious adverse events related to this study to ECH within seven (7) days verbally and in writing within fourteen (14) days.

This certificate is valid until June 04, 2025. You are required to submit annual reports for continuing review.

Please accept my congratulations.

Yours Sincerely,

Professor C. Charles Mate-Kole
ECH Chair

Cc: Dr. Augustina Naami, Department of Social Work, UG
Dr. Donis Akyere Boateng, Department of Social Work, UG
Dr. Kingsley Saah Touh Mort, Department of Social Work, UG

APPENDIX 2
INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR YOUTH WHO HAVE EXPERIENCED
CYBERBULLYING IN AYAWASO-WEST MUNICIPALITY

My name is Oyesimisola Fagbenro, a final year MPhil student in the Department of Social Work at the University of Ghana, Legon. I am researching the topic “Cyberbullying: exploring the experiences of youth in Ayawaso-West Municipality” in partial fulfilment of a Master of Philosophy Degree in Social Work. Your contributions will help us understand the topic under study. Information gathered will be used for academic purposes only and will be kept confidential. Responses cannot be traced back to you in any way as your name will not be attached to your input. Your participation in this study is voluntary and you can choose to withdraw participation or opt out at any time.

A. Participant Information

School: What school do you attend?

Grade: What grade are you in?

Gender: Male or female

Age: How old are you?

OBJECTIVE	KEY QUESTION	PROBE QUESTIONS
-----------	--------------	-----------------



Forms of cyberbullying experienced by youths	Could you please tell me about your experience with cyberbullying	When did the cyberbullying begin? How did it begin? What was your first response or thought? On which online platform did you experience cyberbullying? Did you know who was behind it? How often did it occur? How long did it occur? Did the method by which you were cyberbullied change throughout the experience? How did it stop?
How Cyberbullying Affects Youths	Could you please tell me about your life after cyberbullying	How do you think your experience with being cyberbullied has changed you? Is there anything you would have done differently? Did it affect any of your relationships?



Coping Strategies employed by youth who have experienced cyberbullying	What strategies did you use to cope with or manage being cyberbullied	When you were going through cyberbullying what feelings did you experience? How did you deal with those feelings? Did you learn anything about coping or managing cyberbullying? Did you do anything to attempt to stop the cyberbullying? If yes, was it effective? Did you tell anyone about the cyberbullying? If yes, who did you tell and why did you choose to tell that person? If not, why not? Did you receive support from anywhere else like student groups or community or counselling at the university or secondary school?
Grievance control mechanisms available	Did you report the incident when it occurred?	Did you report the incident? If yes, to whom and why? Was anything done to try to stop it? If yes, what intervention took place? What would you say about discussions on anti-bullying initiatives?

		What do you think can be done to prevent or stop cyberbullying?
--	--	---



APPENDIX 3
INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR KEY INFORMANTS FROM YHR CYBERSECURITY
AUTHORITY ON YOUNG PERSONS EXPERIENCES OF CYBERBULLYING IN
AYAWASO-WEST MUNICIPALITY

My name is Oyesimisola Fagbenro, a final year MPhil student in the Department of Social Work at the University of Ghana, Legon. I am researching the topic “Cyberbullying: exploring the experiences of young persons in Ayawaso-West Municipality” in partial fulfilment of a Master of Philosophy Degree in Social Work. Your contributions will help us understand the topic under study. Information gathered will be used for academic purposes only and will be kept confidential.

Responses cannot be traced back to you in any way as your name will not be attached to your input. Your participation in this study is voluntary and you can choose to withdraw participation or opt out at any time.

A. Participant Information

How long have you worked with Cybersecurity Authority /

What department do you work in?

Gender: M/F

Objectives	Key Questions	Probe Questions
Forms of cyberbullying experienced by youths	What forms of cyberbullying have you witnessed being experienced by youths?	Which of these forms are nouvelle and which are old?
Ways Cyberbullying Affects Youths	In what ways have you seen cyberbullying experience affect youths?	What other ways can cyberbullying affect youths?
Coping Strategies employed by youth who have experienced cyberbullying	What coping strategies have you witnessed cyberbullying victims use after an incident?	Are there better coping strategies you suggest they can employ?
Reporting and grievance control mechanisms	What reporting and grievance control mechanisms are available to youths who have experienced cyberbullying?	What is the rate of reporting from the Ayawaso West Municipality at the Cybersecurity Authority? Why do youths not report cases of cyberbullying?

		What mechanisms do you suggest be brought to light for youths who experience cyberbullying? How does Cybersecurity Authority handle cyberbullying reports?
--	--	--

