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WORKPLACE CYBERBULLYING AND ONLINE HARASSMENT: EFFECTS ON EMPLOYEE MENTAL HEALTH AND ORGANIZATIONAL COMMITMENT

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Abstract

With more communication happening online, cyberbullying has become more common, causing stress, anxiety, low self-esteem, and other mental health problems for employees. The study examined how these experiences affect job satisfaction, commitment to the organization, and intentions to leave. Using case studies, surveys, HR interviews, and examples from different countries including the Blakey v. Continental Airlines case and incidents in Nigeria the research shows that cyber bullying can come from coworkers, managers, and even students, and that it often goes unreported. The findings highlighted the need for organizations to take action by creating clear anti-cyberbullying policies, providing employee training, offering counseling and support, and monitoring digital communication responsibly. The study therefore, recommended among others, the involvement of organizational managers in promotion of healthy relationship among workers, and better cyber law protections. By following these steps, organizations can create safer workplaces, support employee well-being, and improve overall effectiveness. This paper provides useful guidance for HR professionals, policymakers, and organizational leaders on handling workplace cyberbullying.

Keywords: Employee well-being; Cyber law, Online harassment; Job satisfaction: Workplace cyber bullying;

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Résumé

À mesure que les échanges se multiplient en ligne, le cyberharcèlement au travail est devenu plus fréquent, engendrant stress, anxiété, baisse de l'estime de soi et autres problèmes de santé mentale chez les employés. Cette étude a examiné l'impact de ces expériences sur la satisfaction au travail, l'engagement organisationnel et l'intention de quitter l'entreprise. S'appuyant sur des études de cas, des enquêtes, des entretiens avec des responsables des ressources humaines et des exemples issus de différents pays — notamment l'affaire *Blakey c. Continental Airlines* et des incidents survenus au Nigeria —, la recherche démontre que le cyberharcèlement peut émaner de collègues, de supérieurs hiérarchiques ou même d'étudiants, et qu'il fait rarement l'objet d'un signalement. Les résultats soulignent la nécessité pour les organisations d'agir en mettant en place des politiques claires de lutte contre le cyberharcèlement, en formant le personnel, en proposant des services de soutien et de conseil, et en assurant une surveillance responsable des communications numériques. L'étude préconise notamment l'implication des managers dans la promotion de relations saines entre les travailleurs ainsi qu'un renforcement de la protection juridique en matière de cyberharcèlement. En adoptant ces mesures, les organisations peuvent créer des environnements de travail plus sûrs, favoriser le bien-être des employés et améliorer leur efficacité globale. Cet article offre des orientations utiles aux professionnels des ressources humaines, aux décideurs et aux dirigeants d'entreprise pour gérer le cyberharcèlement au travail.

Mots-clés : Bien-être des employés ; Cyberharcèlement au travail; Droit du numérique. Harcèlement en ligne ;; Satisfaction au travail.

Introduction

Cyberbullying and online harassment refer to harmful, hostile, or intimidating behaviours carried out through digital communication technologies such as emails, instant messaging platforms, workplace collaboration tools, and social media. In professional environments, these behaviours may take the form of repeated hostile messages, deliberate exclusion from online work-related discussions, spreading harmful rumours through digital channels, or public humiliation via emails or group messaging platforms (Kowalski *et al.*, 2014). Unlike traditional forms of workplace bullying, which are often confined to physical office settings and working hours, cyberbullying transcends spatial and temporal boundaries, allowing harassment to occur at any time and from virtually any location (Einarsen *et al.*, 2020).

The rapid expansion of digital communication in modern workplaces has significantly altered how employees interact, collaborate, and manage professional relationships. While digital tools have improved efficiency and connectivity, they have also created new avenues for misconduct and abuse (Farley *et al.*, 2016). The increased reliance on electronic communication reduces face-to-face accountability and may encourage aggressive or inappropriate behaviour, particularly when perpetrators perceive a degree of anonymity or distance from their targets (Barlett & Gentile, 2012). From a Social Learning Theory (SLT) perspective, such behaviours can be learned and reinforced within organizational environments, where employees may imitate hostile online conduct observed among colleagues or superiors, especially when such actions go unpunished or are implicitly rewarded.

A defining characteristic of workplace cyberbullying is the permanence and visibility of digital content. Harmful messages, images, or comments can be stored, shared, and repeatedly revisited, prolonging their psychological impact on victims (Tokunaga, 2010). This permanence intensifies emotional distress, as individuals may feel that the abuse is ongoing and uncontrollable. Furthermore, the potential for a wide audience—such as colleagues,

supervisors, or external stakeholders—to witness online harassment amplifies feelings of shame, vulnerability, and powerlessness (Smith *et al.*, 2008). Drawing on Cognitive Behavioral Theory (CBT), these experiences can shape individuals' thought patterns, leading to negative cognitive appraisals such as self-doubt, fear, and mistrust, which in turn influence emotional responses like anxiety, stress, and depression.

Research suggests that cyberbullying in the workplace is not merely an extension of traditional bullying but a distinct phenomenon with unique psychological consequences (Coyne *et al.*, 2017). The blurring of boundaries between work and personal life means that employees may struggle to disengage from harassment, even outside working hours. This constant exposure can contribute to heightened stress levels, emotional exhaustion, and diminished psychological well-being, emphasizing the need for greater scholarly and organizational attention to cyberbullying and online harassment in professional contexts.

The growing integration of digital communication technologies into professional environments has fundamentally transformed how employees interact, collaborate, and conduct organizational activities. While tools such as email, instant messaging, virtual meeting platforms, and workplace social networks have improved connectivity and efficiency, they have also created new avenues for harmful behaviours, including cyberbullying and online harassment (Kowalski *et al.*, 2014; Barlett & Gentile, 2012). Employees subjected to workplace cyberbullying frequently experience a range of psychological challenges, including heightened stress, anxiety, depressive symptoms, emotional exhaustion, and diminished self-esteem (Coyne *et al.*, 2017). The permanence and public nature of digital content can exacerbate these effects, as victims may perceive the harassment as persistent and inescapable (Tokunaga, 2010).

Beyond individual outcomes, workplace cyberbullying also has significant organizational implications. According to Organizational Commitment Theory, negative workplace experiences such as exposure to online harassment can weaken employees' emotional attachment to their organization, reduce job satisfaction, and increase turnover intentions. Empirical evidence indicates that cyberbullying is associated with reduced productivity, disengagement, and strained workplace relationships, all of which can negatively impact team dynamics, trust, and overall organizational culture (Farley *et al.*, 2016; Hoel *et al.*, 2017).

Despite its serious psychological and organizational consequences, workplace cyberbullying remains an underexplored area of research compared to traditional forms of bullying. Most studies have focused on adolescent or general populations, with limited attention given to professional settings where the dynamics, motivations, and consequences of cyberbullying may differ (Smith *et al.*, 2008). This gap in the literature highlights the need for further investigation into the prevalence, psychological effects, and organizational outcomes of cyberbullying in the workplace, as well as the development of effective prevention and intervention strategies tailored to professional environments.

Objectives of the Study

The primary objectives of this study are:

1. To examine the psychological effects of cyberbullying and online harassment on employees.
2. To explore how experiences of workplace cyber bullying and online harassment influence organizational commitment, job satisfaction, and employee engagement.
3. To make recommendation on how cyber bullying in the work place can be curbed to enhance workers' relations and productivity.

Methodology

Research Design

This study adopts a literature-based research design with focus on content analysis and conceptual review. It synthesizes existing academic literature and empirical review rather than collecting new data.

Sources of Literature

The current review draws on a wide range of high-quality sources to ensure a comprehensive and evidence-based understanding of workplace cyberbullying and its impacts. The primary sources include peer-reviewed journal articles, which provide empirical research findings derived from surveys, experiments, and longitudinal studies. These studies are essential for understanding the measurable effects of cyberbullying on employees' psychological well-being, job satisfaction, engagement, and organizational outcomes. In addition, the review incorporates academic books authored by experts in psychology, organizational behavior, and human resource management. These texts offer theoretical frameworks and in-depth discussions that contextualize the empirical findings, helping to link observed outcomes with broader models of workplace behavior and employee well-being.

The review also considers reports published by reputable organizations, such as professional associations and governmental agencies, which provide data on workplace trends, prevalence of cyber bullying, and policy recommendations. These sources contribute practical insights and highlight real-world implications for managing cyberbullying in organizational settings. By integrating peer-reviewed articles, scholarly books, and authoritative reports, the review ensures that the analysis is grounded in both empirical evidence and established theory. This combination of sources strengthens the credibility of the findings and provides a balanced perspective on the psychological and organizational impacts of workplace cyberbullying.

Relevant literature was selected based on its focus on workplace cyberbullying and its psychological (e.g., stress, anxiety, depression, self-esteem) and organizational impacts (e.g., job satisfaction, engagement, productivity, and commitment). Priority was given to peer-reviewed journal articles, as well as reputable academic books and reports. Studies focusing solely on technical, legal, or cybersecurity issues were excluded unless they addressed human or organizational factors. These criteria ensured the inclusion of credible and relevant sources aligned with the study's objectives.

Analytical Approach

A thematic analysis is employed to systematically examine and interpret the literature reviewed in this study. This approach involved carefully reading and comparing the selected sources to identify recurring themes, concepts, and patterns related to workplace cyberbullying and its effects. The analysis focused specifically on three key thematic areas: mental health consequences, behavioral outcomes, and organizational commitment.

Within the theme of mental health consequences, attention was given to patterns related to stress, anxiety, depressive symptoms, emotional well-being, and self-esteem as reported across empirical studies. For behavioral outcomes, the analysis examined recurring findings related to employee engagement, disengagement, job satisfaction, productivity, absenteeism, and turnover intentions. In terms of organizational commitment, the literature was analyzed to identify consistent evidence regarding employees' loyalty to their organizations, willingness to remain in their roles, and overall attitudes toward their employers. By organizing findings into these thematic categories, the analysis enabled a structured comparison of results across

different studies, helping to highlight areas of agreement, contradiction, and research gaps. This thematic approach ensured that the review provided a coherent synthesis of existing research and offered a clear understanding of how workplace cyberbullying affects both individual employees and organizational functioning.

Ethical Considerations

This study is based exclusively on a review of previously published literature and therefore does not involve the direct participation of human subjects, data collection, or interaction with participants. As a result, formal ethical approval from an institutional review board or ethics committee is not required. Nevertheless, ethical principles were carefully upheld throughout the review process. All sources used in the study were accurately cited and fully acknowledged to maintain academic integrity and to give proper credit to original authors. Care was taken to represent the findings of previous studies faithfully and without misinterpretation, ensuring that results and conclusions were reported responsibly and in context. In addition, the review avoids plagiarism by paraphrasing information appropriately and by referencing all ideas, data, and direct quotations. By adhering to these ethical standards, the study ensures transparency, credibility, and respect for the intellectual contributions of other researchers.

Literature Review And Empirical Evidence

Research on workplace cyber bullying shows it is a prevalent and harmful phenomenon with measurable impacts on employee well-being and organizational outcomes. For example, a cross-sectional survey of Finnish workers found that monthly cyber bullying victimization at work ranged from 12.61% to 17.39%, with associated psychological distress and work exhaustion (Nielsen *et al.*, 2020). In U.S. healthcare settings, approximately 19% of dental hygienists reported experiencing workplace cyber bullying within six months, highlighting that such behaviors occur across diverse professional sectors (Chou *et al.*, 2023). Among hospital nurses, 8% reported cyber bullying, which significantly influenced symptom experience and turnover intentions (Privitera *et al.*, 2019).

The negative effects of workplace cyberbullying are well documented. Victims experience increased stress, lowered job satisfaction, and mental strain, which can undermine performance and workplace relationships (Wiederhold, 2022). Organizational consequences include diminished trust, reduced work engagement, higher absenteeism, and turnover, as well as potential legal exposure if harassment is left unaddressed (Ahmad & Dastjerdi, 2023).

Case Studies and Empirical Evidence from Existing Research

One of the most influential legal precedents involving workplace cyber-harassment is *Blakey v. Continental Airlines, Inc.*, decided in stages in 1998 and 2000. Captain Tammy Blakey, one of the first female pilots to fly the Airbus A300 for Continental Airlines, filed a lawsuit against her employer alleging sexual harassment and a hostile work environment. A central element of her complaint involved derogatory comments and hostile postings on an internal employee internet bulletin board that questioned her competence and professional role. Although the case was primarily framed as a sexual harassment claim, the courts explicitly recognized the platforms in facilitating workplace harassment. This acknowledgment set a critical precedent for employer liability in cases where harassment occurs through digital channels, emphasizing that the medium online or offline does not diminish the harm inflicted on employees (law.justia.com).

The *Blakey* case remains highly relevant in contemporary discussions of workplace cyber bullying because it illustrates how digital communications can serve as vectors for harassment, with significant psychological and professional consequences. In today's increasingly digital workplaces, employees communicate through email, team collaboration

tools, internal social platforms, and videoconferencing, all of which can be leveraged to target, exclude, or demean colleagues. This evolution in communication technology has expanded opportunities for cyberbullying, making the lessons of *Blakey* essential for modern HR policy and organizational practice. The *Blakey* case remains critical because it establishes that employers are responsible for managing digital harassment and protecting employees in both physical and virtual work environments.

In conclusion, *Blakey v. Continental Airlines* serves as a landmark case for understanding workplace cyberbullying. It demonstrates that digital harassment can create a hostile work environment and that organizations have a legal and ethical duty to prevent and address such behaviors. Contemporary research shows that cyber bullying is prevalent, harmful, and disruptive to both individual employees and organizational health. As workplaces increasingly rely on digital communication, the lessons from *Blakey* remain essential for cultivating safe, respectful, and legally compliant professional environments.

Qualitative Incidents from Interviews (2014) Cyberbullying at Work

A significant source of insight into workplace cyber bullying comes from the qualitative study “*Cyber bullying at Work: In Search of Effective Guidance*” by West *et al.* (2014). This study, published in *Laws*, draws on interviews with human resources professionals to document real-world experiences of digital harassment in organizational settings. The accounts gathered in the research provide concrete examples of how cyberbullying manifests, the forms it takes, and the negative consequences it produces for employees and workplace dynamics.

The study highlights several forms of digital harassment. Disgruntled employees frequently used online platforms to post derogatory comments about colleagues’ behaviours and professional reputations. These included inappropriate remarks on social media targeting both peers and managers. In one documented incident, an HR professional described reviewing snapshots of Facebook posts in which employees insulted colleagues with statements such as “this person is really rude... shouldn’t be working here.” These posts, visible to others, extended beyond private grievances and entered public digital spaces, amplifying the social and professional impact of the attacks.

Multiple respondents in the study also described other digital behaviors, including hostile emails, messaging apps, and internal social platform posts, that caused distress and embarrassment for the recipients. Such behaviors not only damaged individuals’ reputations but also contributed to ongoing tension within teams. The repeated exposure to these hostile messages created an environment where victims felt anxious, unsafe, and reluctant to participate fully in workplace communication, demonstrating that cyberbullying has a sustained psychological impact.

The qualitative data from this study underscore the interpersonal and organizational consequences of workplace cyberbullying. Unlike traditional face-to-face harassment, digital harassment is often persistent, public, and difficult for victims to escape, which can intensify emotional distress and feelings of isolation. Moreover, the study highlights how cyberbullying undermines workplace relationships, fostering distrust and tension among colleagues and disrupting team cohesion. From an organizational perspective, such repeated harassment can also harm overall morale, reduce productivity, and potentially expose employers to liability if complaints are not addressed adequately.

In summary, West *et al.*’s (2014) qualitative research provides vivid, real-world examples of workplace cyber bullying and emphasizes the importance of effective management strategies. By documenting both the methods of digital harassment and the impact on employees and teams, the study reinforces the urgent need for organizations to implement clear policies, establish reporting mechanisms, and create supportive workplace cultures that discourage cyberbullying in all its forms.

Management of Cyberbullying: A Nigerian University Case Study (2022/2023)

A notable Nigerian case study examining workplace and institutional cyberbullying is the 2022–2023 qualitative exploratory study conducted at a southwestern Nigerian university. The research investigated how cyber bullying was understood and managed within the institution, focusing on both staff and students. Unlike survey-based studies that measure prevalence, this research drew on interviews with senior administrators, archival records, and documented incidents, offering a comprehensive view of how digital harassment manifests in professional and academic environments (Onah *et al.*, 2022).

The study revealed that cyber bullying incidents frequently went unreported due to low awareness of what constitutes digital harassment and a lack of formal reporting mechanisms. Archival records demonstrated recurring patterns of online misconduct, while interviews with decision-makers highlighted their struggles to respond effectively in the absence of clear policies. The consequences of these unresolved incidents included distress, tension, and strained interpersonal relationships, illustrating how unchecked cyberbullying can disrupt both professional and academic dynamics.

Furthermore, the study emphasized the critical role of organizational leadership in addressing digital harassment. Without formalized policies, staff and students remained uncertain about the procedures for reporting cyberbullying, leading to persistent confusion and workplace stress. This Nigerian case study demonstrates that cyber bullying is not confined to informal online interactions; it can infiltrate institutional structures, compromise employee and student well-being, and challenge organizational cohesion. Overall, it underscores the urgent need for policy frameworks, awareness campaigns, and management strategies to mitigate the harmful effects of cyberbullying within institutional contexts.

Socio-Economic Implications of Cyberbullying in Kebbi State, Nigeria (2025)

Another important Nigerian study examined the socio-economic effects of cyberbullying in the Kebbi Central Senatorial District. Although the research was not conducted within a corporate workplace, its qualitative case-study approach offers valuable insight into how cyberbullying shapes individuals' social and economic lives—implications that are equally relevant to professional settings. Through interviews and focus group discussions, the study documented personal experiences of online harassment, highlighting the emotional distress, reputational damage, and financial losses associated with sustained cyber bullying (Akoji *et al.*, 2025).

The research found that victims often experienced social isolation, reputational damage, and reduced productivity, highlighting how cyberbullying can limit personal and professional opportunities. Respondents also reported emotional distress and anxiety, which sometimes led to withdrawal from social and economic activities. While this study primarily examined community contexts, the findings translate directly to workplace environments, where digital harassment can similarly reduce engagement, job satisfaction, and overall performance.

The study underscores the importance of awareness and preventative strategies at the organizational and societal level. By documenting real-life examples, it provides evidence that cyberbullying is not merely a personal issue but a broader social problem with tangible economic and psychological consequences. Organizations in Nigeria can draw lessons from these findings, emphasizing proactive policy development and employee support systems to protect individuals from the harmful effects of workplace cyberbullying.

Legal and Policy Analysis of Cyber bullying in Nigeria (2024–2025)

In addition to qualitative case studies, Nigerian research has examined the legal and policy frameworks surrounding cyberbullying. Analyses of the Cybercrimes Act (2015) highlighted both the potential protections offered to victims and the limitations in enforcement, particularly

within workplace contexts. Scholars argued that while the law provides a framework for prosecuting online harassment, organizational-level policies are often underdeveloped or poorly implemented, leaving employees vulnerable to repeated digital abuse (Ogunyemi, 2024).

This research points out that cyberbullying in workplaces is compounded by a lack of formal reporting channels, inconsistent awareness of legal protections, and limited organizational commitment to employee safety in digital spaces. As a result, many victims of online harassment either tolerate the abuse or attempt informal resolution, which often fails to address the root causes. By analyzing the legal and policy landscape, these studies emphasize the critical role of organizational responsibility, showing that legal frameworks alone are insufficient without complementary internal policies, education, and proactive management strategies.

The implications for Nigerian workplaces are clear: cyber bullying is both a legal and managerial challenge. Effective mitigation requires integration of national legal protections with comprehensive organizational strategies, including awareness training, reporting procedures, and disciplinary measures. These findings highlight the need for organizations to take ownership of preventing and managing cyberbullying, rather than relying solely on external legal recourse.

Cyber bullying of University Faculty (2024)

Recent empirical research further illustrates how workplace cyberbullying operates within academic institutions. A cross-sectional study titled *Cyber bullying of University Faculty: Prevalence, Coping, Gender, and Personality Factors*, published in June 2024, examined cyberbullying experiences among 179 university faculty members, providing a contemporary and context-specific example of digital harassment in a professional setting. This study is particularly valuable because it situates cyberbullying within universities, which function as complex workplaces characterized by hierarchical relationships, public visibility, and extensive digital interaction.

The findings indicate that faculty members experienced cyber bullying from multiple sources, including colleagues, administrators, students, and external stakeholders. This multi-directional pattern distinguishes academic workplaces from many traditional organizational environments, as faculty members are frequently exposed to digital communication beyond internal institutional boundaries. As a result, cyber bullying in academic settings can originate from both superiors and subordinates, as well as individuals with no formal employment relationship, complicating accountability and response mechanisms.

Consistent with prior workplace cyber bullying research, the study found that many victims did not formally report incidents, leaving psychological distress and interpersonal tensions unresolved. Factors contributing to underreporting included uncertainty about institutional procedures, fear of professional repercussions, and doubts about the effectiveness of available support systems. This pattern of silence reinforces earlier findings from qualitative HR interviews and organizational case studies, which show that the absence of clear reporting structures allows cyber bullying behaviors to persist unchecked.

Gender differences were also evident, with female faculty members reporting higher exposure to cyber bullying than their male counterparts. This finding aligns with broader workplace and academic literature suggesting that women in visible professional roles may be disproportionately targeted by hostile digital behaviors. Such gendered exposure underscores the intersection between cyber bullying, power dynamics, and institutional culture within academic workplaces.

In terms of psychological impact, respondents reported elevated levels of stress and negative emotional reactions, reflecting the harmful effects of persistent hostile digital interactions. These psychological outcomes have implications for faculty well-being, job satisfaction, and professional engagement, potentially affecting teaching quality, research productivity, and collegial relationships. Taken together, this study provides strong evidence that cyberbullying in academic workplaces is a serious organizational concern involving multiple actors and power relationships, reinforcing the need for universities to adopt comprehensive policies and proactive strategies to prevent and manage digital harassment. Institutional studies conducted elsewhere (table 1) revealed significant negative effect of cyberbullying on work environment

Table 1: Characteristics of Prior Studies on Workplace Cyberbullying

Study / Source	Country / Sector	Sample Size
Nielsen <i>et al.</i> (2020)	Finland (multiple sectors)	3,371 employees
Privitera <i>et al.</i> (2019)	United States (hospital nurses)	249 nurses
Chou <i>et al.</i> (2023)	United States (dental hygienists)	994 respondents
Kowalski <i>et al.</i> (2023)	Cross-national (multiple sectors)	Multiple studies (review)
NAATP Report (2021)	Global workforce	Aggregated survey data
Einarsen <i>et al.</i> (Meta-analysis)	International	137 studies

Note. This table summarizes the geographic context, sectoral focus, and sample characteristics of empirical studies and reviews examining workplace cyberbullying. Sample sizes reflect the number of participants included in each primary study or the scope of studies reviewed in secondary analyses.

Table 2: Prevalence and Documented Organizational Outcomes of Workplace Cyberbullying

Study / Source	Prevalence of Workplace Cyberbullying	Key Documented Organizational Outcomes
Nielsen <i>et al.</i> (2020)	12.61%–17.39% reported monthly cyberbullying	Psychological distress, work exhaustion, reduced work engagement
Privitera <i>et al.</i> (2019)	8% experienced workplace cyberbullying	Increased psychological symptoms, higher turnover intention
Chou <i>et al.</i> (2023)	19% experienced cyberbullying within the prior six months	Job dissatisfaction, emotional strain
Kowalski <i>et al.</i> (2023)	Cyberbullying prevalent across sectors	Depression, anxiety, counterproductive work behaviors
NAATP Report (2021)	64% experienced cyberbullying at least once	Absenteeism (34%), disengagement, resignation
Einarsen <i>et al.</i> (Meta-analysis)	Not prevalence-focused	Strong association between workplace bullying and turnover intention

Note. Prevalence rates vary across studies due to differences in measurement instruments, reference timeframes, and operational definitions of cyberbullying. Organizational outcomes reported include both psychological and behavioral indicators that have implications for employee well-being, engagement, and retention.

Preventive Measures and Interventions

The literature consistently emphasizes that workplace cyberbullying cannot be addressed through isolated actions or reactive responses alone. Effective prevention and intervention require a comprehensive, coordinated organizational strategy that addresses structural, managerial, psychological, and technological aspects of work. Research indicates that embedding preventive measures into organizational systems reduces the occurrence of cyberbullying and ensures prompt responses when incidents arise (Einarsen *et al.*, 2020; Nielsen *et al.*, 2020).

Clear and comprehensive anti-cyberbullying policies are central to such strategies. These policies should explicitly define cyberbullying behaviors—including harassment via emails, messaging platforms, social media, and internal digital systems—to reduce ambiguity and help employees recognize unacceptable conduct (West *et al.*, 2014; Ahmad & Dastjerdi, 2023). Equally important are transparent and accessible reporting mechanisms. Studies show that employees are more likely to report cyberbullying when procedures are clearly outlined, confidential, and perceived as impartial (Nielsen *et al.*, 2020; West *et al.*, 2014). Policies that prohibit retaliation and describe investigation procedures help build trust, whereas the absence of clear reporting structures often leads to silence, underreporting, and prolonged exposure to harm (Einarsen *et al.*, 2020).

Human resource management (HRM) plays a key role in translating policies into practice. Training and awareness programmes educate employees and managers about respectful digital communication, ethical online behavior, and the psychological and organizational consequences of cyberbullying (Farley *et al.*, 2016; Wiederhold, 2022). These programmes also clarify reporting procedures and reinforce organizational expectations. Beyond training, HR professionals ensure that complaints are handled consistently, promptly, and sensitively. Timely and fair responses deter future misconduct and reinforce norms of respect and accountability (Ahmad & Dastjerdi, 2023). HR departments further contribute by promoting supportive leadership and integrating anti-cyberbullying principles into broader initiatives related to employee well-being, diversity, and inclusion, fostering a culture where cyberbullying is neither tolerated nor ignored (Einarsen *et al.*, 2020).

Psychological support systems are also critical for employees affected by cyberbullying. Exposure to digital harassment is linked to increased stress, anxiety, emotional exhaustion, and reduced self-esteem, all of which can impair performance and well-being (Privitera *et al.*, 2019; Kowalski *et al.*, 2023). Counseling services and employee assistance programmes (EAPs) provide professional support, helping employees process experiences and develop coping strategies. These systems also serve a preventive role by signaling that organizations prioritize mental health, encouraging early help-seeking and reducing the risk of chronic psychological harm and disengagement (Wiederhold, 2022). Integrating mental health services into organizational responses reinforces a culture of care, psychological safety, and resilience (Nielsen *et al.*, 2020).

Findings

Psychological Impacts of Workplace Cyberbullying

Existing empirical research consistently shows that workplace cyber bullying is associated with significant psychological harm among employees. For example, Muhonen, Jönsson, and Bäckström (2017) found in a large questionnaire study of over 3,000 working adults that cyberbullying behaviour indirectly relates to poorer well-being and health outcomes, including increased stress and emotional strain, through its negative influence on the social climate of

the workplace. This study suggests that workers exposed to cyber bullying report deteriorations in psychological well-being and overall emotional health.

Other researchers have documented similar patterns. Oksanen, Savela, and Kaakinen (2020) reported that experiences of workplace cyberbullying were linked to psychological distress, including symptoms resembling anxiety and exhaustion, by showing that victims experience higher levels of work-related distress and technostress compared with non-victims. Additionally, broader research on cyber bullying outside strict workplace samples has shown that victims of online harassment report lower self-esteem, greater anxiety, and more depressive symptoms, demonstrating the psychological costs of repeated digital victimization (Peled, 2019). These findings together suggest that cyber bullying can undermine emotional well-being, increase feelings of helplessness, and erode self-worth, especially when employees lack adequate support from supervisors or colleagues.

Overall, the empirical literature indicates that workplace cyberbullying contributes to heightened stress, anxiety, depressive symptoms, and diminished emotional well-being, highlighting the need for organizational policies that recognise and address these negative psychological outcomes.

Cyberbullying and Organizational Outcomes

Empirical research indicates that workplace cyberbullying not only affects employees' psychological health but also harms key organizational outcomes. Employees who experience cyberbullying often report lower job satisfaction, feeling less content and fulfilled in their roles compared with those who do not experience such behavior (Huang & Chen, 2022). Negative online interactions at work have been associated with reduced job performance, as employees become emotionally drained and less motivated in a hostile work environment (Salmela-Aro & Upadaya, 2021).

In addition, exposure to cyberbullying has been linked to lower employee engagement, including reduced energy, dedication, and absorption in work tasks (Coyne, Farley, Axtell, Sprigg, & Best, 2017). Employees who are victims of cyberbullying are often less committed to their roles and organization, which can lead to higher disengagement and intentions to leave the job (Tuckey, Bakker, & Dollard, 2012).

These psychological and motivational effects also translate into decreased productivity, as stressed and disengaged employees are less likely to perform effectively, impacting overall organizational performance (Farley, Coyne, Sprigg, Axtell, & Subramanian, 2016). Overall, the literature shows that workplace cyberbullying negatively influences job satisfaction, engagement, productivity, and organizational commitment, emphasizing the importance of preventive measures and supportive policies in professional settings (Huang & Chen, 2022; Coyne *et al.*, 2017). Although research on cyberbullying has grown, fewer studies focus specifically on professional settings. There is also a lack of integrated analysis connecting psychological impacts with organizational outcomes, which this paper seeks to address through synthesis of existing research.

Psychological Implications of Cyber bullying in the Workplace

i). Mental Health Consequences: The literature consistently demonstrates that workplace cyber bullying is strongly associated with negative mental health outcomes among employees. Empirical studies show that individuals exposed to cyber bullying report higher levels of anxiety and depressive symptoms, as persistent digital harassment creates ongoing psychological pressure that is difficult to escape (Coyne *et al.*, 2017; Farley *et al.*, 2016). Because cyberbullying can occur repeatedly through emails, messaging platforms, and social

media, victims often experience prolonged exposure, which intensifies emotional distress and contributes to chronic stress (Muhonen *et al.*, 2017).

In addition to anxiety and depression, research highlights emotional exhaustion as a key consequence of workplace cyber bullying. Studies grounded in occupational stress theory indicate that repeated negative online interactions deplete employees' emotional resources, leaving them feeling mentally drained and overwhelmed (Salmela-Aro & Upadyaya, 2021). This emotional exhaustion can reduce individuals' ability to cope with everyday work demands and increase vulnerability to burnout.

The literature also suggests that workplace cyberbullying can undermine self-esteem and professional identity. Victims may begin to doubt their competence, value, and role within the organization, particularly when the cyber bullying targets their performance or credibility (Coyne *et al.*, 2017). Over time, this erosion of self-esteem contributes to emotional vulnerability, making employees more susceptible to stress-related mental health problems and reducing their overall sense of psychological well-being (Farley *et al.*, 2016).

Overall, empirical evidence indicates that workplace cyber bullying has serious and lasting mental health consequences, affecting employees' emotional stability, self-confidence, and capacity to cope with work-related stressors.

ii). Behavioral and Social Effects: The literature indicates that psychological distress resulting from workplace cyber bullying often leads to noticeable behavioral and social changes among employees. Empirical studies show that individuals who experience cyberbullying frequently respond by withdrawing from teamwork and social interactions, as avoidance becomes a coping strategy to reduce further exposure to negative digital encounters (Coyne *et al.*, 2017). This withdrawal can limit collaboration, reduce knowledge sharing, and weaken interpersonal connections within work teams.

Research also suggests that workplace cyberbullying is associated with reduced motivation and disengagement from work-related activities. Employees who feel targeted or threatened online may become less enthusiastic about their tasks and less willing to participate in optional or collaborative activities, which negatively affects overall work performance and morale (Farley *et al.*, 2016). In addition, victims may deliberately avoid digital communication platforms, such as email or messaging systems, to protect themselves from further harassment, which can disrupt workflow and communication efficiency (Oksanen *et al.*, 2020).

In some cases, exposure to cyberbullying may lead to defensive or hostile behavioral responses. Studies grounded in stress and coping theory suggest that prolonged exposure to online harassment can provoke irritability, anger, or confrontational behavior, particularly when employees feel powerless or unsupported by their organization (Muhonen *et al.*, 2017). These reactions can further strain workplace relationships, escalate conflicts, and contribute to a negative social climate, ultimately affecting team cohesion and organizational functioning (Tuckey *et al.*, 2012).

Overall, the literature highlights that workplace cyber bullying not only affects individual mental health but also alters employees' behavior and social interactions, with consequences for teamwork, communication, and the overall quality of workplace relationships.

iii). Impact on Organizational Commitment

Empirical studies consistently suggest that employees exposed to workplace cyberbullying report lower morale and reduced job satisfaction. Repeated negative digital interactions, such as hostile emails or exclusion on online platforms, create a work environment perceived as unsafe and unsupportive, undermining overall satisfaction (Coyne *et al.*, 2017). Victims often feel undervalued and disrespected, leading to a decline in positive attitudes toward their work

and organization. For instance, Farley *et al.* (2016) found that employees who experienced workplace cyberbullying reported significantly lower job satisfaction, with psychological strain and emotional exhaustion acting as key mechanisms. Similarly, Oksanen *et al.* (2020) linked cyberbullying victimization to dissatisfaction and disengagement, particularly in digitally intensive environments. Muhonen *et al.* (2017) further showed that job satisfaction declines not only because of bullying itself but also due to a lack of organizational support, which intensifies negative experiences.

Workplace cyberbullying and negative digital interactions also significantly reduce employee engagement by weakening employees' emotional connection to their organization. When employees face hostile or disrespectful communication, their sense of safety and belonging declines, resulting in lower energy, dedication, and involvement in work. Studies (Coyne *et al.*, 2017; Farley *et al.*, 2016) indicate that emotional exhaustion plays a central role in reducing enthusiasm and motivation. Sustained exposure to such stressors drains employees' emotional and cognitive resources, leading to disengagement (Salmela-Aro & Upadaya, 2021). In addition, Oksanen *et al.* (2020) found that cyberbullying is associated with reduced organizational commitment and increased withdrawal behaviors, such as avoiding collaboration. These patterns demonstrate how cyberbullying undermines trust, motivation, and overall engagement.

The literature further indicates that workplace cyberbullying is strongly associated with increased turnover intention, as employees become more likely to consider leaving their organization. Persistent exposure to hostile digital communication erodes emotional attachment to the workplace and leads employees to view exit as a coping strategy (Coyne *et al.*, 2017). Farley *et al.* (2016) found that employees experiencing cyberbullying reported higher intentions to quit, with emotional exhaustion again acting as a mediating factor. Likewise, Oksanen *et al.* (2020) linked cyberbullying victimization to withdrawal behaviors and intentions to leave, especially in highly digital work settings. Muhonen *et al.* (2017) emphasized that turnover intentions are even stronger when employees perceive low levels of social and organizational support, highlighting the importance of how organizations respond to such incidents.

Beyond individual outcomes, workplace cyberbullying negatively affects organizational culture by undermining trust, collaboration, and psychological safety. When such behaviors occur, employees may become reluctant to communicate openly or share ideas due to fear of being targeted (Coyne *et al.*, 2017). This erosion of trust creates a climate of defensiveness and weakens interpersonal relationships. Muhonen *et al.* (2017) found that cyberbullying damages perceptions of organizational climate, particularly when management fails to intervene, reducing employees' willingness to speak up or engage in constructive dialogue. Similarly, Tuckey *et al.* (2012) showed that negative psychosocial environments characterized by low trust and poor support are linked to reduced engagement and commitment. Over time, cyberbullying can normalize disrespectful behavior, weaken shared values, and diminish collective morale, ultimately creating a less supportive and inclusive work environment.

iv). Role of Digital Platforms and Technology

As digital communication becomes increasingly central to modern work, the literature underscores the importance of responsible management of digital platforms and technologies. Organizations are encouraged to establish clear guidelines governing the use of emails, instant messaging systems, internal forums, and work-related social media to promote respectful online interaction and discourage misuse (West *et al.*, 2014; Ahmad & Dastjerdi, 2023). These guidelines clarify expectations and help prevent digital tools from becoming channels for harassment or exclusion. Responsible and ethical monitoring of digital platforms can also

support early identification of harmful behaviors, provided such monitoring is conducted transparently and in line with privacy standards (Einarsen *et al.*, 2020). In addition, organizations are encouraged to use technology proactively by promoting digital civility, inclusivity, and collaboration. Training employees on appropriate digital conduct ensures that technology enhances productivity and communication rather than contributing to workplace conflict or psychological harm (Wiederhold, 2022).

Many victims avoided reporting incidents, leaving psychological distress unresolved. These findings indicate that cyberbullying is multidirectional and can occur across formal and informal hierarchical structures, affecting well-being, collegial relationships, and job performance (West *et al.*, 2014; Nielsen *et al.*, 2020).

Discussion

Workplace cyberbullying is a complex organizational issue with significant consequences for both employees and institutions. Across the literature, there is consistent evidence that cyberbullying negatively affects mental health, workplace relationships, and overall organizational functioning (Einarsen *et al.*, 2020; Nielsen *et al.*, 2020; Kowalski *et al.*, 2023). Studies show that it is a widespread problem, with prevalence rates ranging from about 12–17% of employees experiencing it regularly to a much larger proportion encountering it at some point in their careers. This indicates that cyberbullying is a global concern affecting diverse sectors and professional contexts.

Unlike traditional workplace bullying, cyberbullying can originate from multiple sources, including supervisors, colleagues, clients, and even external stakeholders, making it more difficult to identify and manage. Its psychological impact is substantial, with victims reporting stress, anxiety, emotional exhaustion, and reduced self-esteem. These effects often extend beyond individuals, disrupting teamwork, eroding trust, and weakening organizational culture. Evidence also suggests that female employees are more frequently targeted, highlighting the need for gender-sensitive interventions.

Organizational outcomes are equally concerning. Cyberbullying may be linked to higher turnover intentions, absenteeism, and lower employee engagement, all of which reduce productivity and morale. The problem is often intensified by underreporting, as employees may fear retaliation or doubt that management will respond effectively. Overall, the literature emphasizes that workplace cyberbullying is pervasive and harmful, underscoring the need for proactive policies and supportive organizational practices to promote a safe and respectful work environment.

Conclusion

Workplace cyberbullying is a widespread organizational issue that negatively affects employee well-being and performance. Research consistently shows that it harms mental health, leading to stress, anxiety, and emotional exhaustion, while also damaging workplace relationships and trust. It can originate from multiple sources—supervisors, peers, or external actors—making it difficult to manage.

Cyberbullying is also linked to key organizational problems, including reduced engagement, increased absenteeism, and higher turnover intentions. Underreporting further worsens the issue, as employees often fear retaliation or lack confidence in organizational responses. Overall, the literature highlights the need for proactive and supportive strategies to create a safe and respectful work environment.

Implications for Practice and Policy

Organizations must treat workplace cyberbullying as a key issue affecting both employee well-being and performance. Effective responses include clear anti-cyberbullying policies that define acceptable behaviour, reporting procedures, and accountability, alongside training programmes that promote awareness and respectful digital communication.

Providing psychological support, such as counseling and employee assistance programmes, is also essential to help affected employees cope and maintain productivity. Additionally, gender-sensitive approaches and appropriate monitoring of digital platforms can further reduce risks and support a safe, inclusive work environment.

Recommendations

Based on the evidence reviewed, organizations should prioritize three key strategies to address workplace cyberbullying effectively:

- a) Organizations should implement clear anti-cyberbullying policies that define prohibited behaviors, reporting procedures, and disciplinary measures, aligned with relevant cyber law frameworks to ensure legal compliance.
- b) Employee training should address cyberbullying, digital etiquette, and legal implications, ensuring awareness of policies and potential consequences.
- c) Accessible counseling and mental health resources should be provided to support victims and help them navigate any legal issues arising from digital harassment.
- d) Responsible monitoring of digital platforms should be established, balancing harassment prevention with employee privacy and legal safeguards.
- e) Managers should be trained to recognize cyber harassment, respond effectively, and integrate emerging cyber law developments into organizational practices.
- f) In jurisdictions with limited cyber harassment laws, organizations should advocate for legal reforms and collaborate with authorities to strengthen employee protection and promote digital safety.

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