

## The Evolution of Cyberbullying in Children and Adolescents

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### Abstract

*The current research aims to investigate the evolution of cyberbullying in children and adolescents, as several studies have indicated that there is a development of cyberbullying at different stages of life. The problem of cyberbullying is a growing issue at different stages of life and is closely related to other variables such as aggression and engaging in cyberbullying. Internet bullying or cyberbullying is a growing problem among school-aged children and adolescents, with increased access to and reliance on technology. It is likely that victims of cyberbullying will become more common. Current estimates indicate that up to 35-20% of children and adolescents have reported being exposed to cyberbullying. As research on online harm is still relatively new, there is no clear understanding of basic information such as physical and developmental differences in experiences of online harm (Al-Anzi, 2019: 25). The cyberbullying scale in this study consists of (15) items for Samathna & Lambros. After verifying the accuracy, stability, and suitability of its translation for the Iraqi environment, the researchers in the current study adopted the descriptive approach. The study aimed to identify the development of cyberbullying among children and adolescents, the statistical differences in the development of cyberbullying according to age (6, 8, 10, 12, 14, 16), gender (male, female), and the researchers used the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS).*

**Keywords:** Cyberbullying, Evolution of Cyberbullying, Children, Adolescents

## INTRODUCTION

### Study Importance:

With the increasing use of modern technology tools and applications by students in schools through the internet, cyberbullying has emerged and become more widespread among users of social media. It is noted that cyberbullying is similar to traditional school bullying but differs in its widespread nature and more dangerous effects. This is due to several reasons, including the bully's ability to hide, the ease of spreading bullying content, the lack of emotional empathy arising from the bully not seeing the effects of their actions on the victim, and the lack of supervision on social media. This has allowed the bully to track their victim outside the school environment, as cyberbullying is not limited to being present at school, making it possible to reach a victim through a mobile phone, email, or messaging programs at any time of the day, with rapid access to a larger audience and quick spread. Exceeding the boundaries of time and place is what makes it more intense compared to ordinary bullying. (Samantha & Lambros 2016) defines a form of aggression that relies on the use of modern communication tools and internet applications such as (mobile phones, computers, email) (Samantha & Lambros: 1, 2016).

Cyberbullying is also defined as intentionally harming others in a deliberate, repeated, and hostile manner through the use of the internet (email and/or electronic games, and/or text messages, and/or social networking sites such as YouTube, Instagram, Twitter, TikTok, and others). Previous studies describe two different patterns of cyberbullying in light of the means used: direct bullying; which is done through the use of the internet/mobile phone to threaten or insult; or deliberately sending virus-infected files; or sending obscene or threatening images or illustrations. There is also indirect bullying; which occurs without the victim directly noticing it, when the bully browses someone's email, impersonates someone else, or spreads harmful information through mobile phones, email, and chat programs (Shennawi, 2014).

The childhood stage is followed by the adolescent stage, which is one of the most important stages that an individual goes through in their various growth stages. This stage witnesses many changes in aspects of mental,

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emotional, and social growth, as well as noticeable physical changes, and during this stage, the individual's self-perception crystallizes (Al-Rikibat, 2015:1).

From this perspective, it is possible to suggest some questions that the current research is trying to answer:

- Does cyberbullying evolve through childhood and adolescence stages?

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

The theoretical framework represents the foundation or pillar on which the researcher relies in identifying and carrying out research procedures, as well as forming a philosophical basis on which the research is based and interpreting its results (Dawood and Abdul Rahman, 1990: 128).

### **The Concept of Cyberbullying**

The next generation is the pillar of the nation, its present and future, especially in childhood and adolescence, as they play a key role in the advancement and development of society to achieve stability and security. Despite this, young people live in the revolution of electronic communication, which has forced individuals to immerse themselves in the technological world and commit to it, leading to the erosion of social barriers. This has resulted in various psychological problems, with one of the most prominent being cyberbullying, which may be a strong obstacle for individuals to adapt to different circumstances. Islamic teachings prohibit violence and all forms of bullying, calling for the prevention of aggression against others, as stated in the Quran: "O you who have believed, let not a people ridicule [another] people; perhaps they may be better than them; nor let women ridicule [other] women; perhaps they may be better than them..." (Al-Hujurat, 11). However, with the rapid technological advancement in recent times, researchers have focused on the concept of cyberbullying, which they consider to be one of the forms of traditional bullying (Abu Al-Diyar, 2012: 33). There are several theories of cyberbullying.

### **First: - Bullying In the Light of Behavioral Theory**

His ideas appeared through Burrhus Fred Rick Skinner, but it is worth mentioning that Watson is considered one of its founders in 1913. The behavioral theory is distinguished by being one of the most important theories that addressed human behavior, especially bullying behavior. The environment is the main cause in determining bullying behavior, and proponents of this theory believe that bullying behavior is nothing but aggressive and impulsive responses. Bullies are characterized by physical and psychological strength, and control over others. The behavioral theory sees bullying behavior as repeatable if it is associated with reinforcement, as behavior is strengthened or weakened based on its impact and outcome. This is known as the Law of Effect in Skinner's procedural learning theory. The feeling of comfort and tranquility that an individual receives tends to be repeated. According to this theory, most human actions are acquired, as human behavior is not by chance or randomly, but through the social learning model that focuses on the importance of imitation and modeling. Individuals learn bullying methods by trying to imitate bullies at school and home. Children who have lived in a threatening environment tend to imitate others regardless of the type or form of behavior. Therefore, in the light of the behavioral theory, we find that the bully is reinforced by the behavior of the individuals around him, such as colleagues and friends, by reaching a level of stardom among his peers, making him feel distinguished and different. The bully achieving what he wants is seen as reinforcement, encouraging him to create bullying situations and build them by attacking individuals around him from colleagues (Al-Sayid., 2019: 15).

### **Social Cognitive Theory**

Albert Bandura is considered the founder of the social cognitive theory, which explains that aggression is transmitted through individuals in the community. Parents or caregivers and peers are considered the primary models that can be imitated, followed by television, visual and auditory stories. Accumulated experiences are what guide the child towards aggressive behavior, with parents being the first source to teach the child this behavior. The second source is due to various biological factors such as intense and violent mood and a strong inclination towards aggression. Consequently, the child learns their aggressive behavior from an environment

that may excessively support it, learning this behavior by imitating their parents or peers as they grow, and from violent television shows (Ahmed, 2013:32). In light of the reviewed theories explaining bullying, it can be said that psychoanalytic theory tends to the individual's aggressive tendency as a result of buried thoughts and experiences related to painful and sad experiences stored within the individual, manifesting in the form of attack, violence, or bullying. On the other hand, behavioral theory believes that the individual learns a specific behavior and tends to repeat it based on reinforcement, reward, and punishment, as rewarding the bully when engaging in bullying behavior encourages the bully and others to repeat this behavior. Meanwhile, humanistic theory focuses on respecting the individual and the extent of their self-esteem in society, attributing the importance of the causes of bullying to the individual's unmet biological needs (food and drink), leading to low self-esteem and the growth of bullying behavior in the individual. Social cognitive theory, on the other hand, focuses on learning through imitation and considers it an important source for teaching children, whether it's from parents, siblings, relatives, or peers. When a child acquires bullying in different ways, but the father and mother are able to persuade the child to give up bullying, indirectly through songs, stories, and plays. While cognitive theory suggests that the individual tends to be aggressive and bullying due to a lack of required information, feeling inadequate, and therefore turning to bullying behavior to achieve self-realization and control of others, the individual is unable to perceive and pay attention in social situations, and unable to focus and use learning abilities and basic study skills at the educational level.

The researchers adopted a cognitive theory framework for the study, as it provides evidence that one of the causes of bullying is information deficiency and cognitive immaturity, and because of the misconceptions held by bullies, they tend to always think unilaterally towards others, making the individual feel inadequate and constrained, leading them to bully their peers to control others. The researchers believe that developing awareness, attention, and memory helps the individual to appreciate themselves, and that working on information processing, problem-solving, task focus, and possessing skills, and a study by Baker and Tarikulu (2010, Baker Tarikulu) pointed to identifying the nature of the relationship between cyberbullying and depressive symptoms. This was done on a sample of 122 Turkish high school students, and in order to achieve the study's goal, the following tools were used: the cyberbullying scale and the "Beck" depression scale. The study found the following results: a correlation between exposure to cyberbullying and higher depressive symptoms, with females being more susceptible to depression than males. Campbell's (2012) study aimed to identify the nature of the relationship between cyberbullying, anxiety, and depression. The study was conducted on a sample of 400 high school students, using tools such as a cyberbullying scale, and anxiety and depression scales. The study concluded that victims of cyberbullying acknowledge its severity on their lives, leading to increased anxiety and depression.

Navarro, Yube, Larraaga, and Martine's (2012) study aimed to understand the relationship between victims of cyberbullying, social anxiety, and social difficulties as predictors of cyberbullying. The study was conducted on a sample of 1127 participants aged between 10-12 years, using self-report questionnaires to measure exposure to cyberbullying and social anxiety, and logistic regression analyses. The study found that specific symptoms of social anxiety, such as fear of negative evaluation, increase the likelihood of cyberbullying, with individuals experiencing social anxiety being more vulnerable to becoming victims of cyberbullying.

The study of (Chang, 2015) aimed to investigate the relationship between parental mediation and internet addiction among teenagers, as well as the association with cyberbullying and depression. The study was conducted on a sample of 1808 high school students who completed a questionnaire in Taiwan in 2013. The study used the following tools: a scale for cyberbullying and a scale for depression. The study found that teenagers with lower levels of parental attachment were more prone to internet addiction, cyberbullying, smoking, and depression. Internet addiction among teenagers was associated with cyberbullying, drug use, and depression, while restrictive parental mediation was linked to lower levels of internet addiction among teenagers.

## **THE METHOD**

The researchers translated the Samantha & Lambros scale for cyberbullying into Arabic to align with the study's objectives, research sample, and the Iraqi environment due to cultural and social differences and the

circumstances that children and teenagers are living in (Jaafar 2023). The study adopted the social learning theory, which considers cyberbullying as a form of aggression using modern communication tools and internet applications such as mobile phones, computers, and email. (Samantha & Lampros, 2016). The scale consisted of (15) items, with three alternatives in front of each item: (always applies, sometimes applies, never applies), and weights (3, 2, 1) were assigned to the sequence. The examinee was required to mark (√) next to the alternative representing their answer.

The scale was translated from English to Arabic. The scale was then retranslated from Arabic to English. The two English texts, one representing the original scale and the other the translation from Arabic to English, were presented for comparison to verify the accuracy of the translation. The translated text into Arabic was reviewed by an Arabic language specialist for linguistic accuracy (Arnout, Abdel Rahman, Elprince, Abada, & Jasim, 2020).

### Participants

The total sample size of the study was (240) students from primary, intermediate, and high schools in Baghdad, of both genders, aged between (6-16) years.

### Measurements

After presenting the scale in its initial form to a number of educational and psychological experts for evaluation and judgment on the validity of the items, and to verify the alignment of the items with the intended construct and their suitability for the Iraqi environment, the researchers presented the cyberbullying scale to a group of (14) reviewers, experts in educational and psychological sciences. Based on their feedback, the scale was accepted with instructions and some linguistic modifications were made to adapt and customize the items to the Iraqi environment. The scale received unanimous approval of 100%, with all items retained (Eyal, Jassim, 2019). Statistical analysis of the items is necessary to determine whether the items are able to distinguish between individuals or not. This requires applying the scale to a sample from the research community, which consisted of 240 children and adolescents. The discriminatory power of the items in psychological measures was calculated to exclude items that do not distinguish between individuals and retain the items that do. It was found that all the items had good discriminatory power. The results of the independent samples t-test to calculate the discriminatory power of the items of the cyberbullying scale are shown in Table (1).

**Table (1) Results of the independent samples t-test to calculate the discriminatory power of the items of the cyberbullying scale**

The paragraph	Upper group		Lower group		T-Value
	Mean	Standard deviation	Mean	Standard deviation	
1	2.675	0.615	1.375	0.667	9.056
2	2.775	0.479	1.325	0.693	10.872
3	2.050	0.875	1.425	0.812	3.308
4	2.700	0.464	1.425	0.780	8.878
5	2.625	0.585	1.425	0.747	7.994
6	2.625	0.585	1.375	0.740	8.375
7	2.625	0.667	1.375	0.704	8.144
8	2.750	0.493	1.300	0.648	11.253
9	2.450	0.749	1.350	0.662	6.957
10	2.825	0.500	1.250	0.588	12.894
11	2.725	0.598	1.425	0.780	8.357
12	2.775	0.479	1.350	0.579	11.979
13	2.650	0.662	1.350	0.699	8.534
14	2.775	0.479	1.350	0.662	11.022
15	2.650	0.662	1.275	0.598	9.742

The researchers verified the validity of the items using internal consistency by calculating the correlation coefficient of each item with the total score as an internal consistency measure and using Pearson's correlation coefficient. The results showed that all correlation coefficients were statistically significant when comparing the

correlation coefficients with the critical value of the correlation coefficient of (0.220) at a significance level of (0.05) and degrees of freedom (78).

The table (2) illustrates this.

**Table (2) Values of correlation coefficients between paragraph score and total score of the cyberbullying scale**

The paragraph	Correlation Coefficients	The paragraph	Correlation Coefficients
1	0.629	9	0.692
2	0.735	10	0.784
3	0.302	11	0.775
4	0.684	12	0.826
5	0.715	13	0.785
6	0.740	14	0.780
7	0.766	15	0.757
8	0.870		

It is clear from the above table that all calculated correlation coefficients for the relationship between paragraph score and total scale score were statistically significant when compared to the critical value of correlation coefficients of (0.220) at a significance level of (0.05) and with degrees of freedom (78), therefore no paragraph was excluded from the scale.

#### Scale validity

Validity indicates the scale's ability to measure what it is intended to measure, and based on this, the scale's ability to achieve the purpose for which it was designed is determined (Ouda, 1998: 333).

The researchers confirmed the face validity, content validity, and reliability of the scale, consistency of the scale's item scores that are supposed to measure what should be measured. The importance of reliability comes after the importance of validity because a valid scale is considered reliable, while a reliable scale may not be valid for measuring a specific trait or characteristic. The scale may be internally consistent in its items but measure a different trait than the one it was designed to measure. However, despite this, it is necessary to confirm the scale's reliability because a perfect valid scale may not exist in the psychological field, and the presence of scale reliability means the scale is trustworthy and can be relied upon to provide results when applied multiple times on individuals themselves and under similar conditions. The stability indicates the consistency of the scale in measuring what is supposed to be measured regularly), and another indicator of stability is the indicator of internal homogeneity, which can be verified as all scale items measure the same concept (Fraj, 1980: 332).

To calculate the stability in the current research scale, the researchers used the internal homogeneity indicator using the Cronbach's alpha equation, as the scale was applied to a sample of stability consisting of (240) individuals selected by the researchers from the research community using random sampling. Table (3) illustrates the stability sample.

**Table (3) The stability sample distributed by age and gender**

Age	Males	Females	Total
years 6	20	20	40
years 8	20	24	40
years 10	20	20	40
years 12	20	20	40
years 14	20	20	40
years 16	20	20	40

Total	120	120	240
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Internal consistency using the Cronbach's alpha equation:

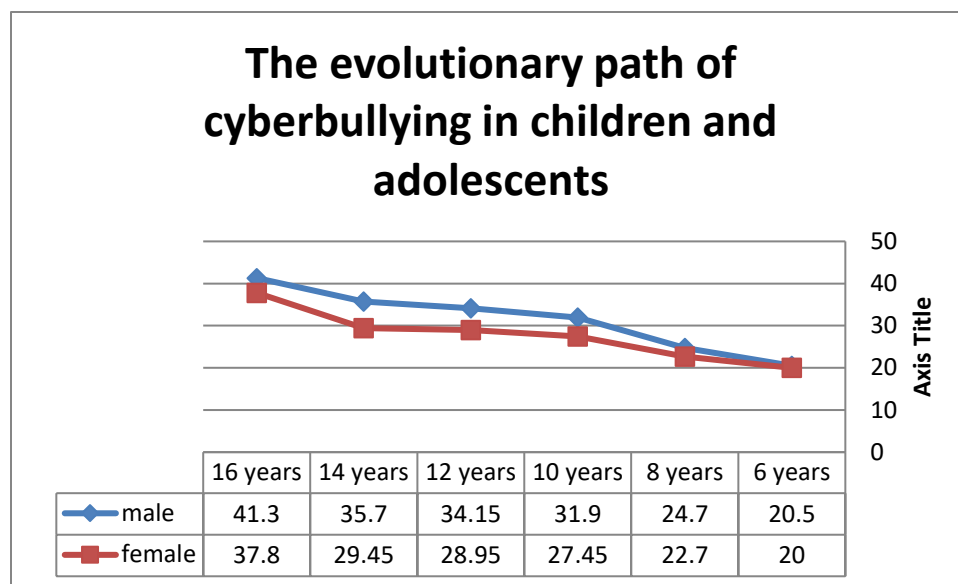
This method is preferred for measuring stability, as it measures the internal consistency and homogeneity among the test items, meaning all items actually measure the same property, which is achieved when the items are interrelated within the test. To calculate the stability of this research scale using this method, the researchers applied the scale to a stability sample of (240) individuals, and the stability coefficient for the cyberbullying scale was (0.949), which is considered good, as indicated by Aisawi (1985) that a stability coefficient ranging from (0.70-0.90) is a good indicator for a reliable test.

## RESULTS

The level of cyberbullying among children and adolescents is defined according to age (6, 8, 10, 12, 14, 16) and gender (male - female)), to verify this objective, the researchers used a single-sample t-test to determine the significance of the statistical differences between the means of the six age groups and the hypothetical mean of the scale, and the results are as shown in the table.

**Table (4) Results of the one-sample t-test to determine the level of cyberbullying according to age and gender variables**

Scale	Age	Gender	Number	Mean	Standard Deviation	Hypothetical Mean	T-Value			Statistic al Significance
							Calculated	Tabular	Significance Level	
cyberbullying	6	ذكور	20	20.500	4.650	30	9.135	2.093	0.05	Function for Hypothetical Mean
		اناث	20	20.000	4.553		9.821			Function for Hypothetical Mean
	8	ذكور	20	24.700	7.108		3.334			Function for Hypothetical Mean
		اناث	20	22.700	7.512		4.346			Function for Hypothetical Mean
	10	ذكور	20	31.900	6.298		1.349			Non-function
		اناث	20	27.450	3.705		3.077			Function for Hypothetical Mean
	12	ذكور	20	34.150	5.314		3.492			Function for Sample Mean
		اناث	20	28.950	6.692		0.702			Non-function
	14	ذكور	20	35.700	5.252		4.853			Function for Sample Mean
		اناث	20	29.450	7.701		0.319			Non-function
	16	ذكور	20	41.300	1.301		38.819			Function for Sample Mean
		اناث	20	37.800	4.162		8.380			Function for Sample Mean



**Figure (1)** Graphical representation of the mean distribution of the research sample on the cyberbullying scale

It is clear from the above table results that:

The calculated t-values for the age groups (6-8) years, and females in the age group (10) years, were statistically significant when compared to the critical t-value (2.093) at a significance level of (0.05) and with degrees of freedom (19). This result indicates the presence of statistically significant differences between the sample mean and the hypothetical mean of the cyberbullying scale, and that this difference was in favor of the hypothetical mean. This result indicates a decrease in the level of cyberbullying among individuals in these groups.

The calculated t-values for males in the age group (10) years, and females in the age groups (12-14) years, were not statistically significant when compared to the critical t-value (2.093) at a significance level of (0.05) and with degrees of freedom (19). This result indicates no statistically significant differences between the sample mean and the hypothetical mean of the cyberbullying scale, and this result indicates that individuals in these groups have an average level of cyberbullying.

The calculated t-values for the age group (16) years, and males from the two age groups (12-14) years were statistically significant when compared to the tabulated t-value (2.093) at a significance level of (0.05) and degrees of freedom (19). This result indicates a statistically significant difference between the sample mean and the hypothetical mean of the electronic bullying scale, with the direction of this difference favoring the sample mean. This suggests that individuals in these age groups have a high level of electronic bullying.

**Second Objective:** (To determine the statistical significance of differences in electronic bullying among children and adolescents based on age and gender), the researchers used a two-way analysis of variance to determine the significance of differences between males and females in electronic bullying according to the age categories adopted in the current research. The results are shown in Table (5).

**Table (5) Results of two-way analysis of variance to determine the significance of differences in electronic bullying among children and adolescents according to age and gender variables.**

Source of variation	Sum of squares	Degrees of freedom	Mean squares	Percentage (F)	Statistical significance
Gender	132.017	1	132.017	3.759	Non-function
Age	9221.950	5	1844.390	52.515	Function
Age * gender	69.733	5	13.947	0.397	Non-function
Error	8007.700	228	35.121		

From the results in the table above, the following is evident:

**Gender:** The calculated F-ratio was (3.759), which is smaller than the tabulated F-ratio of (3.920) at a significance level of (0.05) and degrees of freedom (1, 228). This result indicates no statistically significant differences based on gender.

**Age:** The calculated F-ratio for the age variable was (52.515), which is greater than the tabulated F-ratio of (2.290) at a significance level of (0.05) and degrees of freedom (5, 228). This result indicates statistically significant differences based on age.

And as the results of the analysis of variance indicated the presence of statistically significant differences according to the age variable, the means and standard deviations for each age group were calculated. The results are shown in Table (6).

**Table (6) Means and standard deviations for the research sample on the electronic bullying scale according to age variable.**

Age	Number	Mean	Standard deviation
6	40	20.250	4.550
8	40	23.700	7.289
10	40	29.675	5.576
12	40	31.550	6.519
14	40	32.575	7.235
16	40	39.550	3.522

To identify the source of the differences according to the age variable, the researchers used the Scheffe post hoc test for pairwise comparisons. The results are as shown in Table (7).

**Table (7) Scheffe post hoc test results for statistical comparisons on the electronic bullying scale according to the age variable.**

Scale	Side-by-side comparison	Difference between means	Critical Scheffe value	Statistical significance
Cyberbullying	8 - 6	3.450	1.830	Function in favor of 8 years
	10 - 6	9.425		Function in favor of 10 years
	12 - 6	11.300		Function in favor of 12 years
	14 - 6	12.325		Function in favor of 14 years
	16 - 6	19.300		Function in favor of 16 years
	10 - 8	5.975		Function in favor of 10 years
	12 - 8	7.850		Function in favor of 12 years
	14 - 8	8.875		Function in favor of 14 years
	16 - 8	15.850		Function in favor of 16 years
	12 - 10	1.875		Function in favor of 12 years
	14 - 10	2.900		Function in favor of 14 years
	16 - 10	9.875		Function in favor of 16 years
	14 - 12	1.025		Non-function
	16 - 12	8.000		Function in favor of 16 years
16 - 14	6.975	Function in favor of 16 years		

From the above table, it is clear that electronic bullying among children and adolescents follows an evolutionary path according to the age variable.

**Interaction between age and gender:** The calculated percentage for the interaction between gender and age variable (0.397) is smaller than the critical percentage (2.290) at a significance level of (0.05) and degrees of freedom (5, 228). This result indicates the absence of statistically significant differences for this variable.

## CONCLUSIONS

The internet, communication revolution, and information technology have granted us opportunities that would not have been possible without the existence of this technology, which is no longer a luxury but a vital necessity. Therefore, we must realize its importance and take preventive measures against its electronic risks in their various forms. The lack of control over social media, especially at the present time, has led to significant and evolving problems, especially among adolescents, the most prominent of which is bullying and the ease and speed of spreading content among individuals on social media platforms such as WhatsApp, Facebook, Twitter,



TikTok, Instagram, etc. To become a big problem and lead to many major problems in the world, especially in Iraq, leading to the commission of crimes and also the suicide of some individuals. In order to maximize the benefit and make knowledge more useful, we must use the internet and its various technologies in a balanced way. We are dealing with a generation that keeps pace with tremendous technological advancements, but unfortunately in the wrong way, so we must educate our sons and daughters about their roles and what they should do if they encounter any electronic problem, no matter what it is, and the methods they use towards that. They should deal with and interact with technology quickly and significantly, as fast as its development. Therefore, it is our Islamic duty to raise awareness among them and provide them with cultural programs that prevent them from falling into cyberbullying.

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