

## CYBERBULLYING AMONG MALAYSIAN YOUTH

LAI CHEE SERN, MIMI MOHAFFYZA MOHAMAD, LEE MING FOONG,  
KAHIROL MOHD SALLEH, NOR LISA SULAIMAN, D'ORIA ISLAMIAH  
ROSLI &  
WILSON CHANG VUI SENG

### ABSTRACT

*The purpose of this research was to survey the current situation concerning cyberbullying among youth in Malaysia. Specifically, this research aimed at finding out the prevalence of cyberbullying among youth based on demographic data and the common types of cyberbullying tactic. The survey method was adopted as the research design in which a set of questionnaire was developed to collect the data. A total of 1406 respondents were selected in this research. In general, the research findings reveal that majority of the respondents had been cyberbullied before. The Malays community yielded the highest percentage of cyberbullied victims. In addition, the result also shows that female cyber users were usually targeted as the cyberbully victim. The most common type of cyberbully tactic was through receiving offensive/ pornographic materials. Effective and pragmatic steps have to be taken in order to mitigate the cyberbullying problem among Malaysian youth.*

**Keywords :** Cyberbullying, Youth, Cyber User, Cyberbully Tactic, Cyberbully Victim

### ABSTRAK

*Kajian ini bertujuan untuk meninjau keadaan sebenar bagi masalah buli siber dalam kalangan remaja di Malaysia. Secara khususnya, kajian ini dilaksanakan untuk menentukan sejauh mana kelaziman masalah buli siber yang berlaku berdasarkan aspek demografi responden dan juga taktik yang biasa digunakan dalam buli siber. Kajian ini adalah berbentuk tinjauan di mana borang soal selidik digunakan sebagai instrumen kajian. Seramai 1406 responden telah menyertai kajian ini. Secara amnya, hasil kajian menunjukkan bahawa majoriti daripada responden pernah dibuli siber di mana remaja Melayu merupakan golongan yang terbanyak mengalami masalah buli siber. Tambahan pula, hasil kajian ini juga mendapati bahawa pengguna siber perempuan merupakan target utama dalam buli siber. Selain itu, didapati penghantaran bahan yang bersifat kasar dan lucu merupakan taktik yang paling kerap digunakan dalam buli siber. Langkah yang pragmatik perlu diambil dengan kadar segera supaya masalah buli siber dalam kalangan remaja di Malaysia dapat ditangani dengan berkesan.*

**Kata Kunci :** Buli Siber, Remaja, Pengguna Siber, Taktik Buli Siber, Mangsa Buli Siber

## INTRODUCTION

### ***Background of Research***

In 2012, 15-year-old Amanda Todd who lived in Canada committed suicide due to cyberbullying. She was introduced to an anonymous person on Facebook who flattered her so much to the point of convincing her to flash her topless body to him. A year later, the same person or another anonymous person sent her the picture and it went viral, creating a mass of bullying and teasing on the internet to the point that she could not cope with the depression, and eventually she committed suicide (The Huffington Post, 10 Nov 2012). Likewise, in 2013, a 15-year-old boy from Ireland named Joshua Unsworth took his own life after frequent cyberbullying on a social network site. He was teased about his father being a farmer and peers made fun of his dating habits. This constant barrage of bullying lead to depression and suicide (DailyMail, 7 April 2013).

The above-mentioned tragedies were not isolated cases. The acts of cyberbullying are increasing in every corner of the world. It is taking its place through different countries with Malaysia being one of them. Suicidal case due to cyberbullying rarely occurs in Malaysia, however, it might bring about negative consequences to cyber users, such as depression and embarrassment, if it is not prevented from the beginning.

There are some research on cyberbullying among conducted Malaysia (e.g., Faryadi, 2015; Balakrishnan, 2015), however those investigations have some limitations. For example, Faryadi (2015) only investigated the psychological impact of cyberbullying on students from a single university, and Balakriishnan (2015) only focused on young adults in urban areas. Due to the scarcity of research on cyberbullying in Malaysia, many aspects of cyberbullying in Malaysia remain unknown, many questions arise. For example, which gender group (male or female cyber users) is commonly bullied electronically? What percentages of cyber users have been bullied electronically? What are the common cyberbully tactics? Those questions are closely related to the youth in Malaysia for at least three reasons. First, we are confident to assume that majority of the youth are computer and internet literate due to the prevalence of computer and mobile technology. Therefore, they can be considered as cyber users who might be unintentionally and unconsciously engaged in cyberbullying. Second, the youth can easily and freely access to internet and computer facilities because schools, colleges and universities are usually equipped with those facilities for free. Furthermore, a lot of places, such as shopping malls, governmental agencies, etc., provide free internet access for the public as well. This might provide a higher chance for the youth to expose themselves to the world of cyber, and thereby increasing their chance to cyberbullying. Third, the mode of learning has been shifted from traditional learning method to web-based learning and mobile learning strategies. These changes require adolescents to use computer and internet technology for a longer time and more frequently. This reflects the fact that adolescents in college and university are the main contributors

to the percentage of cyber users. Owing to these justifications, the Malaysian youth are worthwhile to be investigated concerning the issue of cyberbullying. Taken together, this research was conducted to study the current situation about cyberbullying amongst youth in Malaysia.

### ***Research Question***

The research questions are:

- i. What is the percentage of cyber victims according to demographic data (e.g., race)?
- ii. Which gender group (male or female) is usually targeted as victims of cyberbullying?
- iii. What are the common types of cyberbullying tactic?

### ***Scope***

This research was conducted to yield an overview at the current situation regarding cyberbullying among the Malaysian youths between 16 – 40 years old. For the purpose of data collection, states in Malaysia were separated into six zones, namely, northern (Perlis, Kedah, and Pulau Pinang), middle (Selangor, Kuala Lumpur, Putra Jaya, Negeri Sembilan), southern (Melaka and Johor), and East Coast (Pahang, Terengganu, and Kelantan) of Malaysia. The other two zones are Sarawak and Sabah.

### ***Significance of Research***

The findings from this research may help the youth and other related parties to understand the current situation about cyberbullying among the youth. Apart from that, this research also provides up-to-date statistical data regarding cyberbullying within Malaysian context. This data might help other researchers, teachers, policy makers, and parents to understand better about the cyberbullying scenario in Malaysia. Lastly, the research outcomes are expected to help educational institutions, educators and parents to come out with more pragmatic and effective strategies to deal with the issues pertaining to cyberbullying.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### ***Definition of Cyberbullying***

Cyberbullying has been regarded as one of the major problems among youth in the cyber age. Cyberbullying is an act of attack based on deliberately insulting, sending or posting harmful materials, threatening, harassing, hate group recruitment, cruel text, embarrassing another person using images or videos, and all these actions may occur on personal websites or it may be transmitted via social media sites, online chat room, e-mail, instant messenger, or cell phones application (Bosses & Stam, 2011; Potha & Maragoudakis, 2014). Cyberbullying occur not only when children are at home, but also during school. Many schools have taken pragmatic steps to prevent cyberbullies to bully other students by installing filtering software in the

school computers. According to Calvete et.al (2010) cyberbullying is significantly associated with the use of proactive aggression, justification of violence, exposure to violence and less perceived social support of friends. Other reasons for cyberbullying might be attributed to disability, religion, gender, and anger. In this internet era, cyberbully problem becomes even more challenging because cyberbullies often use anonymous identity which is difficult to be traced (Nektaria & Manolis, 2014)

Similar to traditional forms of bullying, cyberbullying is often upsetting and damaging, but it can be even more frightening due to the anonymous nature of the attack (Hoff & Mitchell, 2009). According to Hinduja and Patchin (2009) and Kowalsaki et. al., (2008), the theoretical model that can possibly explain cyberbullying is disinhibited behavioural effect on the Internet. Disinhibition means that normal behavioural restraint can become lost or disregarded (Mason, 2008). Within cyberspace context, cyber users might be lacking social, contextual and affective skills than in face-to-face communication. In addition, they are less sensitive and remorseful for the types of behaviors that they exhibit (Mason, 2008). This might be the reason to explain why cyberbullying occur intentionally or unintentionally. In cyberbullying, perpetrators have no direct social disapproval and punishment for engaging in bullying others and do not see that victim suffer (Willard, 2007). As a consequence, their behaviors are often disinhibited and gradually become ruder, harsher and even more difficult to control (Hinduja & Patchin, 2009).

### ***Types of Cyberbullying***

Cyberbully is a type of bullying that takes place on internet using electronic technology. Previously, online technology is only related to desktop or laptop. Nowadays, both desktop and laptop are not the only electronic products that can be connected to internet. The advance of mobile phones with smart features make it possible to receive and send information quickly and to surf internet websites easily by connecting to Wi-Fi. This change of technology indicates that cyberbullying does not only occur on internet websites using computer technology, but also on mobile phone applications.

Some research findings revealed that cyberbullying is more common in a range of more specific media. According to Smith et. al. (2008), the most common media of cyberbullying are picture/video clip, e-mails, chatroom, instant messaging, mobile phone calls, text message and websites. It is important to note that the new forms of the cyberbullying emerge due to the advancement of internet technology.

Cyberbullying may exist in many forms. For instance, cyberharassment is one form of the cyberbullying that using vulgar and sexual wording to communicate to others (Haber & Daley, 2011). While according to Willard (2006), there are eight categories of cyberbullying, namely, flaming, online harassment, cyberstalking, denigration, exclusion, outing, trickery, impersonation, and masquerade which are to some extent independent of the media used. Apart from that, River and Noret

(2010) claim that cyberbullying is composed of ten categories, namely, name calling, sexual acts, threat of physical violence, threats to damage existing, abusive or hate-related, death threats, menacing chain messages, ending of platonic relationships, demands/instructions, threats to home/family and relationships. New descriptive terms are created in cyberbully context, for example, ‘sexting’ is used to describe the act of circulating sexualised images on mobile phones or Internet without the person consent, ‘trolling’ is used to describe persistent offensive feedbacks or comments on a website, whereas ‘grieving’ is usually used to describe harassment of an individual in a virtual space. Figure 2.1 summarises different types of cyberbullying.

<b>Types of Cyberbullying</b>	
(i) onlineharassment	
(ii) Cyberbullying	Masquerading/Impersonation
(iii) Harassment by proxy	Online grooming
(iv) Denigration (Dissing)	Or Outing
(v) Exclusion/Gossip Group	Plishing
(vi) Falsify identify	Sexting
(vii) Flaming	Trickey

**Figure 1: Types of Cyberbullying**

According to Gordon (2015), not all cyberbullies are the same. In fact, they vary greatly one person to another. In Figure 2.2 shows that each common type of cyberbullies with their own personalities and goals. Their target of cyberbullying to the victims is vastly different.

<b>Types</b>	<b>Explanations</b>
Status-Conscious Cyberbullies	They are very confident and always condescending others and usually these cyberbullies have a group of follower or supporters. In the end they may feel like they had conquered the social media. Typically these cyberbullies are somebody with certain level of social-economic status or popularity. With their higher social status, they are able to control others and they tend to cyberbully others if they perceived that person as socially unacceptable.
Imposters	This type of cyberbully happened frequently in the popular circles of people. These people are hoping to ruin the victim’s reputation. In general, this type of cyberbully occur by faking someone else’s identity (imposter). Imposters usually set up a fake account pretending to be someone else and post a negative comment.

<p>Internet Trolls / Haters</p>	<p>Internet troll or hater is a type of cyberbullies who are more aggressive. They usually use the social media sites or networking to troll the victims by spreading hate. The victims of this troll are typically made up of politicians, strangers, or celebrities. This type of cyberbullies enjoy of seeing other person feel shame, suffer and they never care of what the consequence that will happen.</p>
<p>Bully-Victims</p>	<p>This type of cyberbully is very common and often emerge after being cyberbullied by others. Usually their goal is to get back their power of control. A large number of youth that cyberbully others have been cyberbullied before. In fact, most of the bully-victims are either loner or in despair at their career path.</p>
<p>Accidental Cyberbullies</p>	<p>Accidental cyberbullies will never act as they are the cyberbully. They presume that they are just protecting themselves from being insulted/bullied by others when they respond or react negatively to some issues or topic of discussion on internet. Many people choose to remain silent, report to friends, or just block the user whenever they are confronted with cyberbullying. But for accidental cyberbullies, they often react impulsively and angrily towards negative responses. They tend to attack the one who cyberbully them with the same tactics. But in their mind, they perceive that they are the victims and they need to be protective by attacking back to those who bully them.</p>

Figure 2: Common Types of Cyberbullying Gordon (2015)

**RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

***Research Design***

The nature of the present research project is descriptive which adopted survey technique. The survey technique is suitable for this project because the data collection process involved a large number of respondents.

***Sample***

This project put the focus on the youth all over Malaysia. Data were collected from six zones, namely, northern part, middle part, southern part of Malaysia, east coast, Sarawak, and Sabah. The convenient sampling method was used in this project in

order to speed up the data collection process.

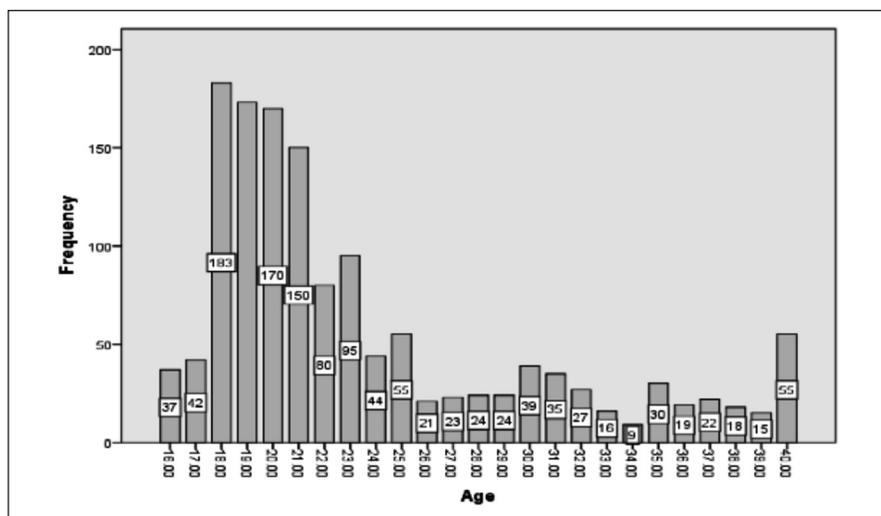
A total of 1406 respondents had answered the questionnaires. According to Krejcie and Morgan (1970), the sample size of 384 is sufficient to represent the population if the population size is equal to 1 million. Based on Krejcie and Morgan statement, 1406 respondents taken in the present research can be considered representative for Malaysian within the age group of 16 to 40 years old.

Of the total respondents, 634 are male (45.1%) and 772 are female (73.8%). The distributions of respondents by zones and age are shown as follows:

Zone	Frequency
Northern part of Malaysia	310
Middle part of Malaysia	227
Southern part of Malaysia	199
East coast of Malaysia	274
Sarawak	177
Sabah	219

**Figure 3: Frequencies of Respondent Based on Zone**

The respondents participated in this research are between 16 to 40 years old. Nevertheless, majority of the respondents' age between 18 to 25 years old. Figure 3.2 shows the distribution of respondents' age.



**Figure 4: Frequency of Respondents Based on Age**

***Instrument***

A self-development questionnaire was constructed for the purpose of data collection. The questionnaire was composed of two parts. The first part was concerning the demographic data of the respondents. Whereas, the second part was designed to measure different variables related to cyberbullying such as common types of tactic used for cyberbullying, and the common cyberbullying tactics. The selecting responses or tick boxes format was used in the questionnaire. The respondents were required to tick at the box if s/he agrees with the statement.

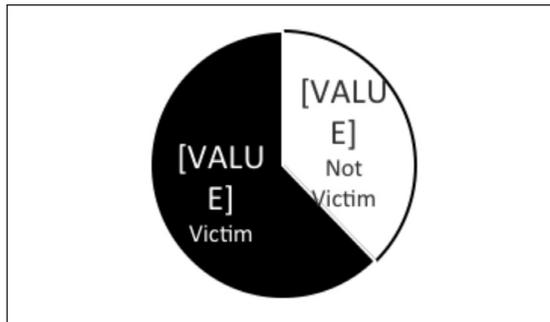
***Data Collection Procedures***

The questionnaires were distributed to the respondents who were available and willing to answer the questionnaires. Each questionnaire was expected to be completed in 15-20 minutes. The completed questionnaires were collected by the researchers. As a token of appreciation, a souvenir was given to each respondent when s/he had successfully answered the questionnaire.

**ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION**

***Percentage of Cyber Victim Based on Demographic Data***

In general, a total of 530 respondents reported that they did not experience cyber bully, whereas 876 respondents had been cyberbullied before. Figure 5 illustrates the percentage of respondents who were cyberbullied.



**Figure 5: Percentage of Respondents Who Experienced Cyberbully**

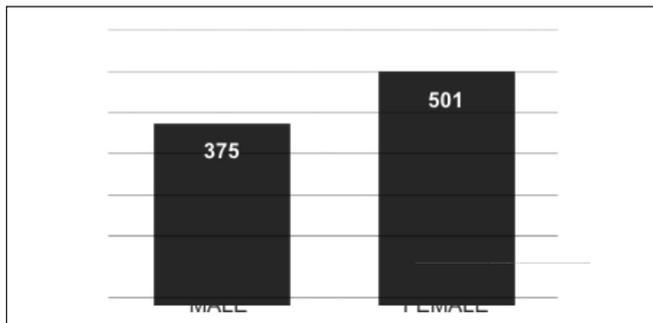
In addition, we also found out that 67.5% of Malays community have experienced cyberbully which is the highest compared to other ethnic groups. Table 1 shows the percentage of respondents who experienced cyberbully based on race.

**Table 1: Percentage of Cyber Victims Based on Race Group**

Race	Had Not Been Cyberbullied	Had Been Cyberbullied
Malays	262 (32.5%)	543 (67.5%)
Chinese	87 (48.6%)	92 (51.4%)
Indian	64 (47.4%)	71 (52.6%)
Bumiputra Sarawak	67 (36.4%)	117 (63.6%)
Bumiputra Sabah	41 (51.9%)	38 (48.1%)

***Gender Group Usually Targeted As Cyber Victim***

In the present studies, it is discovered that majority of female cyber users (57.2%) have been bullied electronically. Compared to male cyber users, the percentage of male cyber users who were cyberbullied is recorded as 42.8%, which is about 15% lower than female users. The data are shown in Figure 4.2.



**Figure 6: Number of Male and Female Cyberbully Victims**

This statistical data appear to reflect the fact that female cyber users have higher tendency to be cyberbullied compared to male cyber users.

Previous research findings are contradictory with regards to gender differences in cyberbullying victimisation. Some studies reported female cyber users are more likely to be cyber victims (e.g., Wang, Iannotti, & Nansel, 2009), whereas other studies found male cyber users are more often to be the victims of cyberbullying (e.g., Aricak et al., 2008). Conversely, some findings indicate that both female and male cyber users experienced cyberbullying equally.

Within the context of Malaysia, the results from the current research reveal that female cyber users have higher tendency to be cyberbullied compared to male users. Therefore, female cyber users must be warier when engaging in online activities on social media sites.

### ***Common Types of Cyberbullying Tactic***

The third objective attempted to answer the question of what common types of cyberbullying tactic are. There are many ways of cyberbullying. One of the common ways is by spreading rumors of victim on social media.

The outcome of analysis shows that a total of 474 respondent (54.2%) have reported that they were cyberbullied by receiving rude or pornographic materials to the victims. There were 47.8% of 429 respondents cyberbullied by receiving hurtful nicknames and mocking or sarcastic languages were used to insult them. The third common types of cyberbullying tactic which accounts for 40.3% of 353 respondents, was through ignoring or boycotting by other cyber users on the online chat room. Threatening victim on the internet is reported as the least common way of cyberbullying in which only 128 respondents (14.6%) have been threatened before on the internet. Spreading victim's message, photos, and video is also regarded as relatively uncommon compared to other means of cyberbullying. Only 18.4% or 161 respondents reported that their message/photo/video have been misused by others. Table 4.2 illustrates the data concerning the types of cyberbullying tactic.

**Table 2: Common Types of Cyberbullying Tactic**

<b>Tactics</b>	<b>Number of Respondent</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
Giving hurtful nicknames/sarcastic language to victim	419	47.8
Sending vulgar/pornographic materials to victim	474	54.2
Ignore/boycott victim	353	40.3
Spreading rumors about victim	338	38.6
Spreading victim's message/photo/video	161	18.4
Using victim's password without her/his permission	272	31.1
Threaten victim on the internet	128	14.6

Within the context of the current research, the three most common cyberbullying tactics have been identified as follows:

- a) Sending rude/offensive/pornographic materials (e.g., picture, video clips, text).
- b) Giving hurtful nicknames; using mocking, sarcastic language.
- c) Ignoring/boycotting someone on chat room/chat group.

## CONCLUSION

The present research findings have revealed that majority of the youth in Malaysia have been cyberbullied before in many different ways. This scenario reflects that cyberbullying among youth in Malaysia has already reached an alarming level. At a micro level, it is learned that cyberbully occurs in every ethnic group of Malaysia. In particular, Malay ethnic is the most vulnerable to cyberbully.

In addition, the findings also indicates that female cyber users are the main cyberbully victim. This result implies that it is riskier for female cyber users to surf on the internet because tendency to be cyberbullied is much higher than the male cyber users.

Apart from that, the research discovers that sending rude/offensive/pornographic materials; giving hurtful nicknames; using mocking, sarcastic language; and ignoring/boycotting someone on chat room/chat group are the most common cyberbully tactics among Malaysian youth.

## RECOMMENDATION

Based on the current findings, several recommendations are drawn to deal with the cyberbullying problem among Malaysian youth.

### *Female Cyber Users*

Female cyber users must pay extra attention and be warier when engage in online activities. They must learn to protect themselves from cyberbullying. Educational institutions, NGOs, and Governmental agencies may play a role in providing advices as well as other relevant information to the cyber users in general and female users in specific in order to assist them to deal with cyberbullying efficiently.

### *Assistance for Cyberbully Victims*

Counselling services and assistance for cyberbullying victims are available and provided by various agencies, however, the cyberbully victims seldom approach those agencies. It might be due to lack of information about those agencies. As a consequence, the cyberbully victims do not know the proper channel to approach those agencies. Therefore, promotion of agencies, societies, NGOs must be actively conducted.

### *Education*

Education can be an effective way to tackle the cyberbully problem. Youngsters must be taught the internet ethics which can be embedded within the existing school curriculum. In addition, they must learn also the behaviors that are prohibited in cyber space. Many cyber users might not be aware that their misbehaviors on the internet can be considered as cyberbully. There awareness on cyberbully among youth must be strengthened through education and school activities.

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**Author's Profile :****Lai Chee Sern, Phd**

Fakulti Pendidikan Teknikal Dan Vokasional  
Universiti Tun Hussein Onn  
lcsern@uthm.edu.my

**Mimi Mohaffyza Mohamad, Phd**

Fakulti Pendidikan Teknikal Dan Vokasional  
Universiti Tun Hussein Onn  
mimi@uthm.edu.my

**Lee Ming Foong, Phd**

Fakulti Pendidikan Teknikal Dan Vokasional  
Universiti Tun Hussein Onn  
mflee@uthm.edu.my

**Kahiroh Mohd Salleh, Phd**

Fakulti Pendidikan Teknikal Dan Vokasional  
Universiti Tun Hussein Onn  
kahiroh@uthm.edu.my

**Nor Lisa Sulaiman , Phd**

Fakulti Pendidikan Teknikal Dan Vokasional  
Universiti Tun Hussein Onn  
norlisa@uthm.edu.my

**D'oria Islamiah Rosli, Phd**

Fakulti Pendidikan Teknikal Dan Vokasional  
Universiti Tun Hussein Onn  
doria@uthm.edu.my

**Wilson Chang Vui Seng**

Unit Penyelidikan dan Inovasi  
Kolej Komuniti Sandakan  
changvcw@gmail.com