
Socio-Legal Enquiry into the Motivating Factors of Cyberbullying in Malaysia

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Abstract

Cyberbullying is the act of bullying or causing harassment or intimidation on another person by using technological means, such as devices, social media or networks. Despite the numerous efforts being carried out by both government and non-government organizations, cyberbullying continues to be on the rise and has become a national concern. This study highlights the motivating factors of cyberbullying in Malaysia. First, the study aims to investigate the factors motivating persons becoming cyberbullying perpetrators. Second, the study aims to examine the factors enhancing the susceptibility of persons becoming victims of cyberbullying. Engaging in both qualitative and quantitative approaches, this study adopts socio-legal approach in understanding and enquiring 19 interview experts and 120 survey respondents. The study found various factors that motivates perpetrators of cyberbullying, which could be divided into internal and external factors. Similarly, the factors that enhance the susceptibility of victims of cyberbullying could also be internal and external. The implication of the study is deeper understanding of the various factors motivating cyberbullying in Malaysia. Inherently, risk management strategies could be proposed could be developed to minimize the factors hence reducing the likelihood of cyberbullying occurrences in Malaysia. Hopefully, the findings of the study would contribute to the body of knowledge on the area of cybercrimes in general, and cyberbullying in particular. It is also hoped that this study would assist the general public to better manage the risk of cyberbullying, within the wider agenda of safe nation in Malaysia.

Keywords: Cyberbullying, cybercrimes, cyber laws, socio-legal, motivating factors

1. INTRODUCTION

Traditional forms of bullying have, over the course of the past few decades, spread into the realm of digital communication, giving rise to a brand new offence that is now known as cyberbullying. The act of shaming, causing a negative influence on, or generating psychological intimidation to another person through the use of a digital device or online means is included under the umbrella term of cyberbullying. Cyberbullying has the potential to be more harmful than traditional forms of bullying that take place in the real world because, in the online realm, it can happen at any time, anywhere, and to anybody [1]. The sense of low self-esteem, theft, suicide, rape, and even murder are all possible outcomes that could be caused by cyberbullying. This type of bullying can also lead to a chain reaction of other major potential damages and events [2-3].

Because of advances in technology and the Internet, bullying has become both more difficult to stop and simpler for bullies to attack their victims. This is because bullies may now remain anonymous while engaging in harmful behaviour toward their victims on the Internet. This anonymity is the most notable distinction between regular bullying and cyberbullying, and it is the Internet that provides the bully with such a distinct competitive edge. Cyberbullies are distinct from the traditional bullies that everyone is

familiar with since it is nearly hard for victims of cyberbullying to find their tormentors. This characteristic of cyberbullies distinguishes them from traditional bullies.

The fact that cyberbullying is not restricted to a particular location further exacerbates the problem. This means that it may occur anywhere, not only in a particular classroom, school, campus, or neighbourhood, but anywhere, even in the most remote parts of the planet. A person who engages in cyberbullying and is armed with a computer, smartphone, or any other type of internet access can victimise someone regardless of where they are physically located. In addition, there is no limit to the amount of time that may be spent engaging in cyberbullying because it can take place instantly at any time of the day, week, or year[1]. Cyberbullying, on the other hand, affects people of any age and may continue to do so for the rest of the victim's life. This is still another important distinction between the two forms of harassment.

1.1 Cyberbullying Laws in Malaysia

Malaysia lacks a law specifically addressing bullying, let alone cyberbullying. However, there seem to be laws in Malaysia that could potentially address cyberbullying, although being scattered. These laws are classified as general constitutional provisions on freedom of speech, criminal, cyber, and civil laws, including Article 10 of the Federal Constitution's general provision on freedom of expression, or specific pieces of legislation such as the Penal Code, Sexual Offences against Children Act 2017, Communications and Multimedia Act 1998, Copyright Act 1987 and Computer Crimes Act 1997. Apart from that, a number of civil law provisions could also expand to cover cyberbullying, such as Employment Act 1955, Industrial Relations Act 1967, Occupational Safety and Health Act 1994, Defamation Act 1957 and Education Act 1996.

Nonetheless, it has been determined that these legislations are not only dispersed but also insufficient to solve the issue of cyberbullying in Malaysia. This is acceptable given that such diverse laws would be particular to the purpose for which they were passed within the boundaries of their statutes, and none of these acts specifically mention bullying or cyberbullying.

1.2 Motivations for Cyberbullying

There are numerous possible motivations for acts of cyberbullying. For instance, something as simple as the end of a romantic relationship can bring about unfavourable emotions like as envy. Inappropriate social settings can lead to changes in behaviour, such as an increased tendency toward coldness. The social context is another aspect that may be a contributor to the existence of opportunities for cyberbullying to take place [2, 4]. People with lower socioeconomic status are more likely to be bullied than those with higher socioeconomic position. The use of the internet can facilitate increased instances of bullying. The World Wide Web is a borderless medium that enables numerous forms of misconduct due to the lack of restrictions it imposes [5]. The inappropriate utilisation of technology has given rise to the current and widespread problem of cyberbullying. To put an end to cyberbullying, however, it is necessary to first comprehend the factors that motivate certain individuals to engage in such behaviour in the first place.

Reference [6] identifies eight different motivations for why individuals engage in acts of bullying or cyberbullying toward others. These include bullying as a response, blaming the victim, bullying as entertainment, peer pressure, bullying or cyberbullying is considered as cool or gives the perpetrator a sense of superiority, and the notion that the bully is not likely to be caught in the act of harassing others.

Many youngsters are bullied on a regular basis, which can result in bullying behaviours such as cyberbullying. These children frequently look for solace in taking their own lives. They do not come up with any more beneficial approaches to deal with the circumstance. Bullying gives victims the idea that they need to exact revenge for the hurt they suffered throughout their childhood in some form or another at some point in their lives [7]. As a result, these children engage in bullying behaviour toward other children. These young people who engage in cyberbullying exhibit no sign of regret for their behaviour. This is due to the fact that these young cyberbullies have, in the past, experienced comparable forms of abuse and suffering. As a result, they would wish for other people to suffer through the same things that they had, and they would not feel bad about doing so[8]. They might find some solace in doing so, as well as justification for the activities they have taken. The situation becomes too much for the victims to bear, and they take their frustration out on the people who wronged them.

Cyberbullies are quick to place the blame on their victims. Schools and workplaces are frequently the settings in which incidents of cyberbullying take place. It's possible that it's due to someone else's higher-than-average perceived social position [9]. This could be the result of a comparison between students that was made by a teacher or between co-workers that was made by their boss. It is also possible for a public scolding to result in feelings of humiliation or dissatisfaction in the recipient of the reprimand. Some adolescents resort to cyberbullying as a coping mechanism to deal with the emotional pain of being rejected in love relationships. Whatever the case may be, those who engage in cyberbullying feel that their actions are in every way acceptable and warranted [10]. As a consequence, they do not typically experience any feelings of guilt.

It is considered a type of enjoyment to engage in cyberbullying. These days, real-world experiences are being turned into dramas that are so cliched that they are also a typical part of people's lives in real life. Bullying is seen by some as a form of entertainment, something they may do to liven up their otherwise mundane life. Bullies are often raised by families that are either ignorant or vindictive. The perpetrators of cyberbullying resort to using the Internet to draw attention to themselves since they do not have any other means at their disposal [10-11]. As a result, individuals choose to amuse themselves by watching digital dramas.

Giving in to the pressure of other people might also lead to engaging in cyberbullying. Almost everyone experiences a desperate need for approval when they are a teenager. Nobody wants to be left to themselves. Every adolescent has the desire to either have a romantic partner or to be accepted into a clique. As a result, they engage in trolling behaviour toward others in order to project an image of coolness in front of the individuals whose approval they desire. As a consequence of this, adolescents do not give the potential consequences of their bullying behaviour a second thought [12]. They worry more about being lonely than they do about the effects that cyberbullying will have on them. Many people have the misconception that if they are doing anything in a group, then it must be equitable. Peer pressure, whether it is direct or indirect, has the potential to transform an innocent adolescent into a bully.

Cyberbullying is becoming increasingly common because, during the years of our life when we are the most impressionable, we erroneously believe that if a large number of people are participating in the same activity, it must be seen as something awesome or cool. Prank films and instances of individuals openly making fun of one another can be found in abundance on the internet [13]. Teenagers are led to assume that because it is so widespread, it must be acceptable behaviour simply because so many others engage in it. In addition, members of their group never exclude them when they bully others. Therefore, they frequently engage in behaviour of this kind.

The people that engage in cyberbullying often feel proud of themselves for their actions. The act of engaging in cyberbullying is seen by many people as a means through which they can demonstrate their superiority over others. They feel a surge of confidence as a result of it. The practise of bullying is frequently regarded as a sign of high social standing. The more renowned children will always find a way to make the less famous children look foolish [14]. Teenagers who engage in cyberbullying will even make fun of a person's appearance if they believe the target is more attractive or more unique than themselves. These bullies utilise the internet to back up their acts and justify their behaviour. Cyberbullies are frequently self-motivated and have a high level of self-confidence, which helps them dominate the game. However, the end purpose of bullying is to make the bully appear more superior than the people being bullied.

In addition, those who engage in cyberbullying have the misconception that they will not be discovered. It has been claimed that children and young people who took part in a study thought no one could follow them on the internet. This belief was supported by their participation. They would feel more at ease if they believed or assumed something of the such. They believed that if they posted stuff using fictitious accounts and fabricated identities, it would be impossible for them to be discovered [15]. They were also totally oblivious to the victim's response; hence, this eradicated any possibility of empathy on their part. They were completely unaware of the degree of the damage their actions would cause to other people. Because of this, it would be much simpler for them to continue doing and saying the same things that they had been doing.

1.3 Statement of Problem and Study Objectives

Despite the fact that a great deal of written material has been produced discussing the elements that encourage the incidence of cyberbullying, people are still at risk of being victims of cyberbullying. According to the findings of a study that was conducted in 2019 by the United Nations Children's Fund

(UNICEF) on the subject of violence against children in 30 different countries, one in three young people in Malaysia are victims of cyberbullying [16]. Recent research has shown that a total of 28 percent of the 6,953 young people living in Malaysia have been the victims of online abuse. In addition, 43 percent of these young people have participated in online private messaging and gambling through the use of social media apps such as WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and YouTube. In addition, the findings of IPSOS's [17] research titled "Malaysian and Global Views on Bullying" reveal that one in every four parents in Malaysia reported that their child has been the victim of cyberbullying. The disturbing scenario of cyberbullying in Malaysia is further substantiated by empirical data from several local research projects addressing the prevalence of cyberbullying and occurrences of cyberbullying [3, 18-19].

It is therefore necessary to have a comprehensive understanding of all of the aspects that might lead to cyberbullying in order to develop strategies for effective cyberbullying prevention, intervention, and remediation. Therefore, carrying out this research with the intention of achieving the following purposes is the reason for doing so:

1. To investigate the factors motivating persons becoming cyberbullying perpetrators.
2. To examine the factors enhancing the susceptibility of persons becoming victims of cyberbullying.

2. METHODOLOGY

In order to achieve the two aims of the study, both qualitative and quantitative methodologies were employed using the socio-legal approach. It is hereby submitted that the data from both qualitative and quantitative methodologies would further enhance the quality of the findings. The qualitative data was generated through personal interviews with 19 respondents who are directly involved with policy making, enforcement and academics revolving around computer crimes and policies. The breakdown of the interview respondents is as shown in **Table 1**. The interview questions were drafted to match with the aims of the study. The data collected from the interviews were then analysed using the computer-aided qualitative data analysis software ATLAS.ti version 9 for the purpose of generating the findings of the study.

Table 1. Interview respondents

Role	No. of respondents
Officers from government agency	3
Persons from non-governmental organisations	5
Enforcement departments	2
Academicians	6
Legal practitioner	1
Health practitioner	2
TOTAL	19

On the other hand, quantitative data was generated through online survey administered on 120 respondents from the public. The breakdown of the survey respondents is as shown in **Table 2**. The data from the online survey in the form of close-ended options was for the purpose of triangulation with the qualitative data in the form of open-ended questions. The survey data was then analysed using simple descriptive approach and reflected in the form of diagrams and images for the purpose of reporting.

Table 2. Survey respondents

Dimension	No.	Description
Gender	51	Male
	69	Female
Race	90	Malay
	13	Chinese
	12	Indian
	5	Others
Age	21	20 years old and below
	31	21-30 years old
	24	31-40 years old
	43	41-50 years old
	1	50 years old and above
Highest	1	Primary school

Dimension	No.	Description
Education	17	Secondary school
	11	Diploma
	60	Bachelor's degree
	31	Postgraduate degree
Marital status	60	Single
	57	Married
	3	Others

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the data generated from the study for both aims of the study.

3.1 Factors motivating persons becoming cyberbullying perpetrators

There could be various factors that would motivate a person to become a perpetrator of cyberbullying. As shown in **Figure 1**, the interviews have highlighted that these factors could be divided into internal and external factors. Depression, frustration, negative behaviour, envy, the aim to cause harm, low self-esteem, and resentment are all examples of internal causes that could be at play. Meanwhile, societal pressure, family history, the wrong set of friends, easy access to the internet, and demands for popularity can all be considered external reasons that motivate cyberbullies.

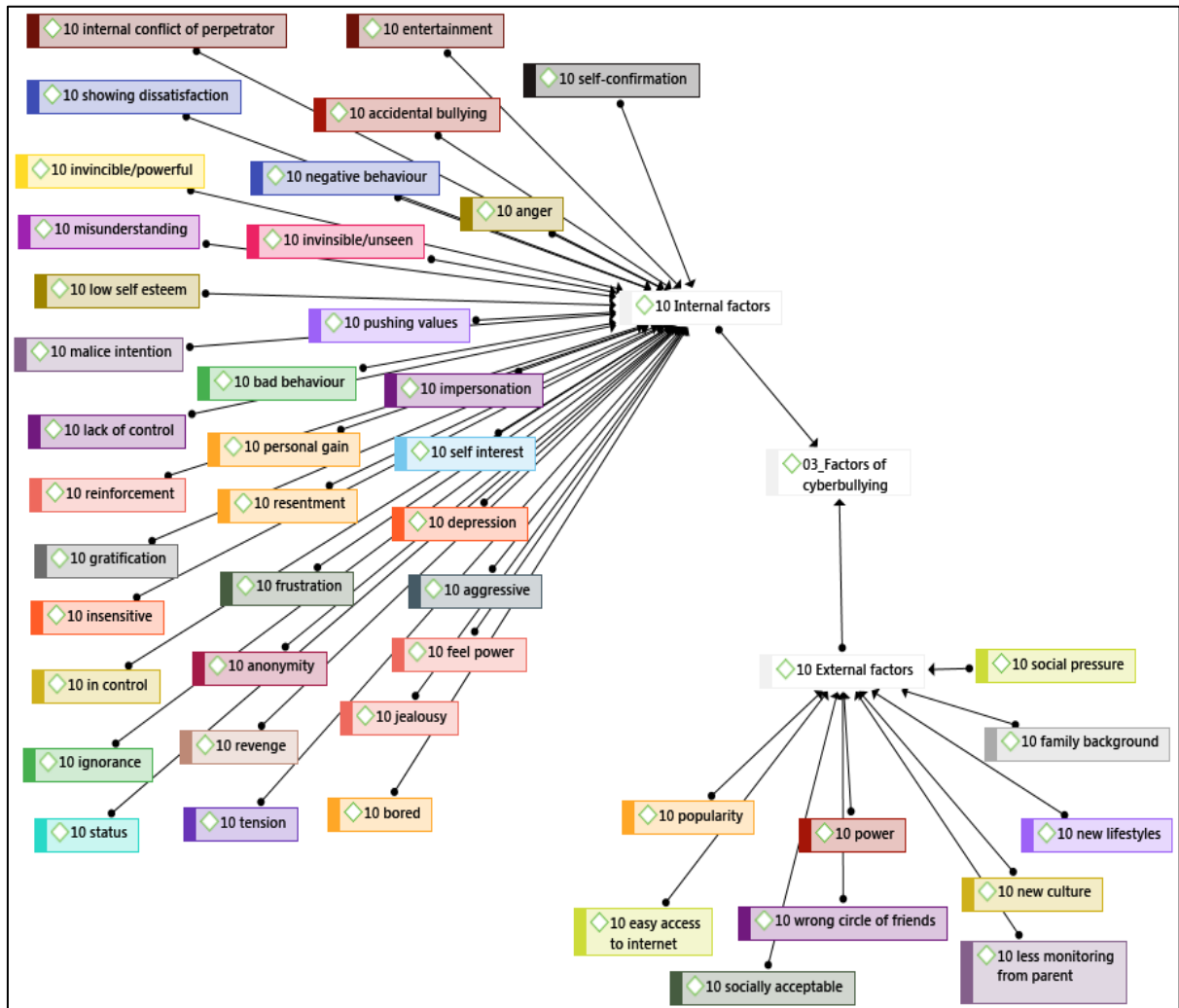


Figure 1. Factors motivating perpetrators of cyberbullying

In addition to the feedback provided by the interview experts, the results from the survey suggest some intriguing discoveries regarding the factors in which offenders would engage in cyberbullying. These criteria are broken down into two categories: adult perpetrators and kid perpetrators. In order to accomplish this, respondents were asked to list, in order of preference, the top five factors that motivate cyberbullies.

The result of the ranking for factors motivating adult cyberbullies is shown in **Table 3** below, with the top choice being media influence (30.8%), followed by family background (25.8%), peer influence (17.5%), lack of self-confidence (14.2%) and pressure at work (9.2%).

Table 3. Respondents’ perceptions of factors motivating adult cyberbullies

	1st choice	2nd choice	3rd choice	4th choice	5th choice
Media influence	30.8	19.2	19.2	15.8	11.7
Family background	25.8	17.5	13.3	22.5	20.8
Peer influence	17.5	30.8	22.5	18.3	9.2
Lack of self-confidence	14.2	20	14.2	17.5	33.3
Pressure at work	9.2	12.5	30.8	25	20

The top five rankings of the factors motivating adults cyber bullies are illustrated in the following **Figure 2**.

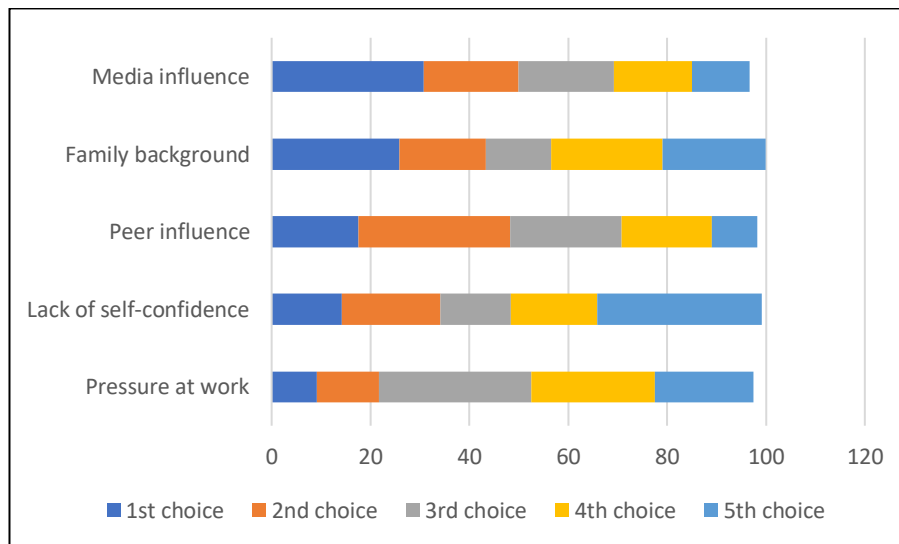


Figure 2. Respondents’ perceptions of factors motivating adult cyberbullies

What could be gathered is that the factors motivating child bullies would be slightly different in terms of ranking, as the top factor for a person becoming a child bully, as shown in **Table 4**, is peer influence (39.2%), followed by family background (29.2%), media influence (16.7%), pressure at school (8.3%) and lack of self-confidence (5.8%).

Table 4. Respondents’ perceptions of factors motivating child cyberbullies

	1 st choice	2 nd choice	3 rd choice	4 th choice	5 th choice
Peer influence	39.2	28.3	13.3	14.2	4.2
Family background	29.2	14.2	21.7	14.2	20.8
Media influence	16.7	27.5	21.7	19.2	13.3
Pressure at school	8.3	20	23.3	30	18.3
Lack of self-confidence	5.8	10	20	20	41.7

The top five choices for factors motivating child cyberbullies are indicated in the following **Figure 3**.

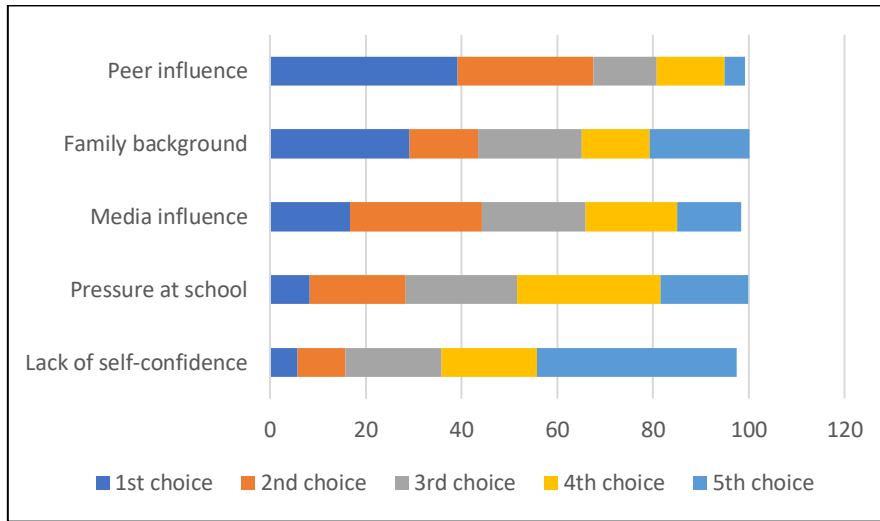


Figure 3. Respondents' perceptions of factors motivating child cyberbullies

3.2 Factors enhancing the susceptibility of persons becoming victims of cyberbullying

It is also interesting to note that various elements were identified that would increase the susceptibility of victims to cyberbullying. This is something that should be taken into consideration. As can be seen in the **Figure 4**, these influences can be classified as either internal or external, depending on their location. Ignorance, a lack of awareness, insecurity, a lower level of peer acceptance, and instability are all examples of elements that come from within. A person's physical appearance, the impact of their peers, their social ranking, and the sense of accomplishment are all examples of external forces.

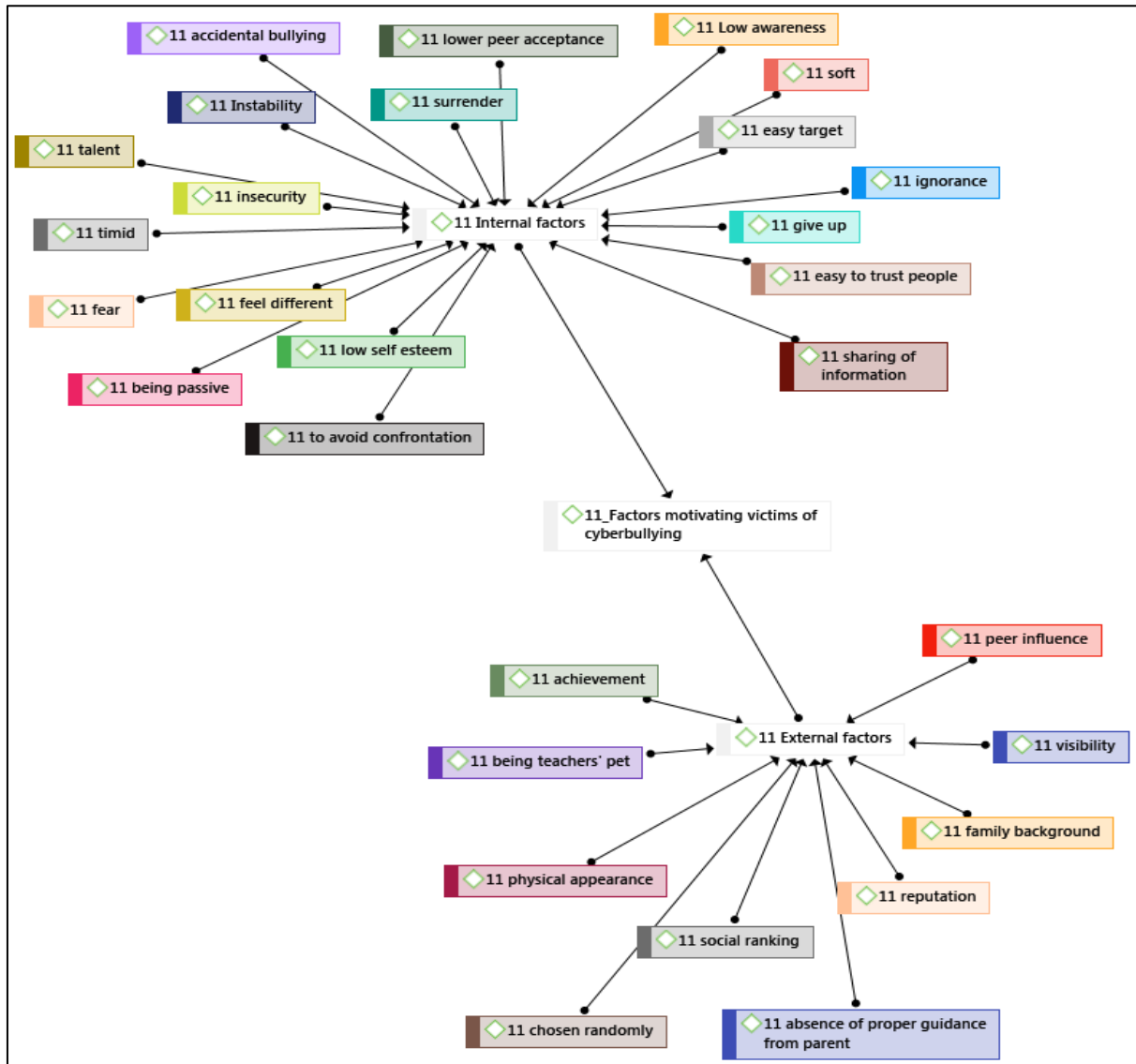


Figure 4. Respondents’ perceptions of factors promoting the susceptibility of victims of cyberbullying

In this regard, data from the survey also showed exciting facts. Survey respondents were asked to rank their top five preferred factors promoting the susceptibility of victims to cyberbullying. As shown in **Table 5**, the top choices for factors increasing the susceptibility of adult victims of cyberbullying were continuous and prolonged access and use of social media (31.7%), lack of understanding of cyberbullying (30.8%), lack of emotional support systems (13.3%), lack of spousal monitoring (6.7%) and family conflict (6.7%).

Table 5. Respondents’ perceptions of factors increasing the susceptibility of adult victims of cyberbullying

	1 st choice	2 nd choice	3 rd choice	4 th choice	5 th choice
Continuous and prolonged access and use of social media	31.7	12.5	15.8	10.8	11.7
Lack of understanding	30.8	20	20.8	10.8	9.2
Lack of emotional support systems	13.3	20	18.3	19.2	20
Lack of spousal monitoring	6.7	15.8	15.8	25.8	15.8
Family conflict	6.7	10	21.7	20	26.7

The top five factors increasing the susceptibility of adult victims of cyberbullying are shown in **Figure 6** below.

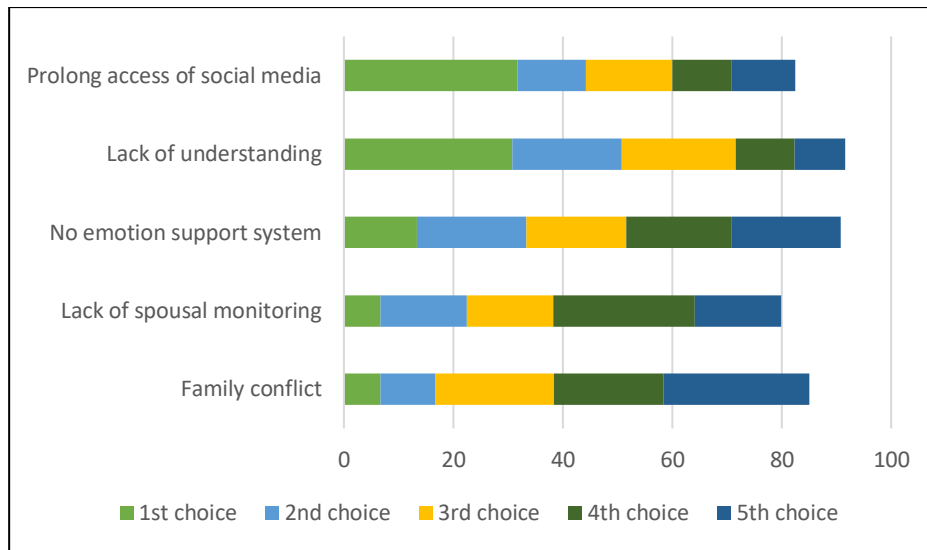


Figure 6. Respondents’ perceptions of factors increasing the susceptibility of adult victims to cyberbullying

Meanwhile, as shown in **Table 6**, the top choices for factors inducing susceptibility of child victims of cyberbullying were lack of parental monitoring (33.3%), continuous and prolonged access and use of social media (29.2%), lack of understanding (14.2%), lack of emotional support (10%) and conflict at school (8.3%).

Table 6. Respondents’ perceptions of factors inducing susceptibility of child victims of cyberbullying

	1 st choice	2 nd choice	3 rd choice	4 th choice	5 th choice
Lack of parental monitoring	33.3	32.5	20.8	8.3	3.3
Continuous and prolonged access and use of social media	29.2	22.5	20.8	7.5	9.2
Lack of understanding	14.2	16.7	24.2	20.8	12.5
Lack of emotional support	10	11.7	17.5	30	18.3
Conflict at school	8.3	11.7	7.5	12.5	20.8

The top five factors inducing susceptibility of child victims of cyberbullying are illustrated in **Figure 7** below.

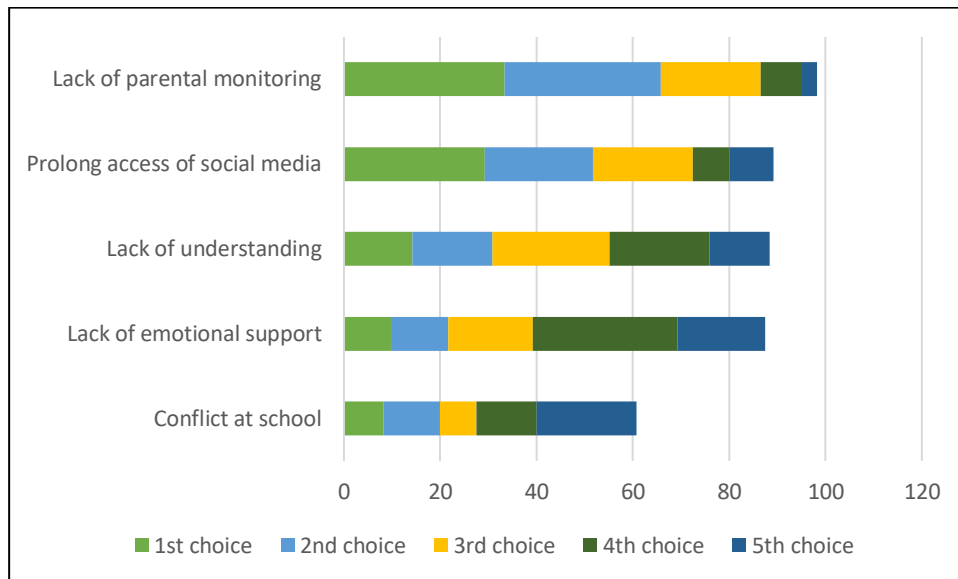


Figure 7. Respondents' perceptions of factors inducing susceptibility of child victims of cyberbullying

4. CONCLUSION

The aims of the paper are two-folds: (1) to investigate the factors motivating persons becoming cyberbullying perpetrators; and (2) to examine the factors enhancing the susceptibility of persons becoming victims of cyberbullying. Data from both qualitative and quantitative have identified various motivating factors in which a person could turn into perpetrators of cyberbullying, or into victims. Given the nature of cyberbullying that takes place in the virtual space, and that it could happen to anyone, anywhere, and at any time, the factors that motivate perpetrators to commit the act of cyberbullying would need to be addressed appropriately before things go out of hand. Factors such as media influence, family background and peer influence seem to top the motivations for a person to commit cyberbullying on another person.

On the other hand, people are also susceptible to fall victims of cyberbullying, be them adults or children. The study had revealed that among the motivating factors for people falling victims of cyberbullying include prolong access of social media, lack of monitoring by spouse/parents as well as lack of understanding of how cyberbullying works. Accordingly, appropriate measures would need to be taken to address the factors so that better protection can be afforded to the potential victims. Family institutions would need to be strengthened so that better monitoring could be rendered, as well as self-consciousness is also desirable so that a person could be concerned about their rights and duties as responsible users of the Internet and world wide web.

Moving forward, future research could be directed towards bigger population of the sample of study. Additionally, future research could also be carried out to investigate the cyberbullying occurrences in specific industries, such as primary and secondary school, higher learning institutions, workplaces as well as other contexts of study. Hopefully this paper could become a catalyst for future research on cyberbullying, cyber harassment, computer crimes and cybersecurity.

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