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Predictors of cyberviolence behavior: a mixed-methods bibliometric and systematic review

Shamsa Al-Fori

s52610@student.squ.edu.om

Sultan Qaboos University

Mohammed Al-Suqri

Sultan Qaboos University

Noura Al-Hosni

Sultan Qaboos University

Ahmed Shehata

Sultan Qaboos University

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Abstract

This combined bibliometric and systematic review examines the predictors of cyberviolence perpetration in adult and general populations. A Scopus search covering 2015–2025 yielded 5,633 records, followed by PRISMA-guided screening and systematic synthesis. Bibliometric mapping shows sustained publication growth, geographic concentration in the United States, Spain and China, and a thematic structure centered on perpetration, moral and psychological mechanisms, digital context, and associated correlates. Across the systematically reviewed evidence, moral disengagement is the most recurrent predictor, alongside Dark Triad traits, empathy deficits and online disinhibition; relationship satisfaction and social capital appear as protective factors in specific contexts. Cross-sectional designs predominate, and platform-specific adult research remains limited. An integrated ecological framework is proposed to organize individual, relational, situational, organizational and societal influences. Because the review relies on one database and a relatively small, heterogeneous corpus, the findings are best treated as an evidence synthesis and agenda for further testing rather than as causal conclusions.

1. Introduction

1.1. Background and Research Gap

Digital communication has expanded the settings in which aggression, harassment and abuse can occur. Cyberviolence is used here as an umbrella term covering behaviors such as cyberbullying, online harassment, cyberstalking, doxing, trolling and technology-facilitated abuse (Cassidy et al., 2013). Although prevalence estimates vary substantially with definitions, samples and measurement periods, prior reviews show that both perpetration and victimization occur across age groups and are associated with psychological and social harms (Bottino et al., 2015; Kowalski et al., 2014; Marciano et al., 2020). Understanding perpetration therefore requires attention to the factors that increase or reduce the likelihood of harmful digital behavior.

Research has identified predictors at several levels. Individual factors include moral disengagement, empathy deficits and personality traits associated with manipulation or callousness; relational factors include relationship quality and social support; situational factors include anonymity and online disinhibition; and organizational or societal conditions may shape norms, accountability and available protective resources (Bandura, 1999; Suler, 2004; Wright et al., 2020; Alrawashdeh et al., 2024). The General Aggression Model and social-cognitive approaches provide useful explanations, but empirical work remains dispersed across populations, platforms and disciplinary traditions. Adult-focused evidence is particularly fragmented because much of the cyberbullying literature concentrates on school-age populations.

Two gaps motivate the present review. First, existing syntheses do not consistently combine field-level bibliometric mapping with a focused systematic assessment of adult/general-population predictors. Second, the literature has not been organized adequately across individual, relational, situational,

organizational and societal levels. A combined approach can show both how the research field is structured and what the empirical studies indicate about perpetration-related factors. This review does not assume that associations reported in predominantly observational studies establish causality; its purpose is to identify recurring patterns, gaps and propositions that require further empirical testing.

The empirical literature also differs in what it treats as a predictor. Some studies examine relatively stable characteristics such as personality; others focus on cognitive mechanisms such as moral disengagement, affective capacities such as empathy, or situational processes such as online disinhibition. Still others identify relational and organizational conditions that may protect against harmful behavior. Treating these findings as parts of one ecological system makes it possible to distinguish recurring predictors from constructs that have been examined only in narrow settings. It also prevents a common interpretive problem in this literature: inferring a general causal pathway from a predictor observed in one platform, age group or cultural context.

Focusing on adults is crucial because developmental and social contexts shift after adolescence. University students, workers, romantic partners, and other adult groups face different accountability, relationship reliance, and organizational rules. While predictors from school-based cyberbullying studies may still be relevant, their impact and underlying mechanisms might differ. This review considers adult evidence as a separate body of research but uses the wider bibliometric map to illustrate its position within the broader cyberviolence field.

1.2. Scope and Review Approach

The review includes all research published between 2015 and 2025 and draws upon the Scopus search engine as its bibliographic resource. For the systematic component of this study, we included only research based on samples of adults (i.e., aged ≥ 18). We excluded research focused solely on minors and studies limited to either a treatment-only sample or a victimization-only sample. Studies focused on detection techniques alone, without psychosocial predictors, along with other non-behavioral studies were also removed. While these restrictions increased the focus on adult perpetrators, they eliminated a substantial body of developmental literature. Furthermore, both English-language and Open Access requirements were established as methodological constraints, whereas limiting searches to a single database (Scopus) was also a methodological constraint, rather than indicative of the totality of the world's scientific evidence represented by this corpus.

Furthermore, the study's dual design provided two analytical levels that have historically been confounded. The bibliometric component examined the structure of scholarship; i.e., who publishes, which regions and/or countries' scholars contribute most frequently to this area of study, how topic clusters emerge within this body of scholarship, and how collaborative efforts among researchers develop. The systematic component addressed the empirical evidence of the subject matter under investigation; i.e., what platforms, theoretical frameworks, methodologies, and predictors are identified as valid in the eligible studies. Findings from the first component were not intended to serve as a surrogate for empirical evidence derived from the second component. Instead, findings from each

component will be compared during the interpretation phase of this project to highlight areas where the structural development of this field of inquiry parallels, or exceeds, the extant level of empirical evidence.

1.3. Research Questions and Contribution

The review addresses four questions:

RQ1 (Bibliometric): What are the main bibliometric characteristics of cyberviolence research between 2015 and 2025, including publication trends, leading contributors, geographic patterns and thematic structure?

RQ2 (Systematic): Which digital platforms and online contexts are most frequently examined in relation to cyberviolence perpetration?

RQ3 (Systematic): What theoretical frameworks and methodological approaches are used to investigate cyberviolence perpetration?

RQ4 (Systematic): Which individual, relational, situational, organizational and societal factors are associated with engagement in cyberviolence behavior?

By integrating bibliometric science mapping with systematic narrative synthesis, the study offers a structured account of the field and an ecological framework for organizing the evidence. The contribution is primarily integrative: it brings together dispersed predictors, identifies where the evidence is concentrated or weak, and specifies methodological and theoretical priorities for subsequent research. The framework is intended to guide future hypothesis testing rather than to be treated as a validated causal model.

2. Methodology

The study has two components: a systematic literature review and a bibliometric analysis. The bibliometric analysis maps the intellectual structure and synthesizes the empirical evidence on predictors of cyberviolence. This dual-method approach enables both quantitative analysis of publication trends, who is publishing this research (contributors), what themes emerge from these publications (thematic relationships), and where collaborations occur among researchers (collaboration patterns); whereas the systematic component reviews empirical evidence related to social media platform types, theoretical frameworks used in these studies, methodological approaches taken by authors, and multi-level predictors.

2.1. Data Source and Search Strategy

Scopus was chosen because it offers standardized bibliographic metadata suitable for mapping science across the social sciences and related disciplines. The search was carried out in January 2026 and included scientific literature published between January 2015 and December 2025. In this study, we have

used a combination of predictor-related concepts and terms for cyberviolence, e.g., cyberviolence, cyberaggression, technology-facilitated abuse, online violence, cyberharassment, and cyberbullying. We provide a complete Boolean query including field constraints and exclusion criteria in the Supplementary Information to enable reproduction of the search.

The search was restricted to Social Sciences, articles and conference papers, English-language publications, open-access records and the 2015–2025 period. Exclusion terms were used to reduce records focused exclusively on child or adolescent populations, clinical or epidemiological outcomes, specified technical detection approaches and educational contexts outside the review scope. These restrictions increased specificity for the adult psychosocial focus but may also have excluded relevant studies that use different terminology or are indexed elsewhere.

The decision to use one bibliographic source was made partly to preserve consistency in metadata for the bibliometric component. Scopus records include standardized author, affiliation, keyword and citation fields that can be exported directly for network analysis. This advantage does not remove database bias. Coverage differs by field, language, region and publisher, and the systematic conclusions are therefore framed as conclusions about the retrieved corpus rather than about every publication on cyberviolence.

2.2. Eligibility, Screening and Study Selection

Eligible records directly examined predictors, determinants, antecedents, risk factors or protective factors related to cyberviolence or cyberbullying perpetration in adult or general populations. Peer-reviewed articles and conference papers were considered. Records were excluded when their primary focus was victimization or consequences, intervention delivery, bystander behavior, narrowly clinical populations, technical or forensic detection without psychosocial predictors, or populations younger than 18 years. Detailed inclusion and exclusion criteria are supplied in the Supplementary Information.

The initial Scopus search returned 5,633 records. After database filters, 246 records proceeded to title and abstract screening. Two reviewers screened records independently, with reported inter-rater agreement of kappa = 0.92; disagreements were resolved through discussion and, when necessary, consultation with a third researcher. Full-text records that passed screening were assessed against the same eligibility criteria. Figure 1 summarizes the PRISMA flow. The accompanying screening log should provide the exact disposition of every record and a reason for each full-text exclusion.

We used a sequential screening approach. Filters within the database narrowed down the initial search results, from which those failing either the population or topic criteria could be eliminated at both the title/abstract level and ultimately through a full-text examination of remaining studies that may meet all eligibility requirements. Age criteria were used as conservatively as possible to ensure a study would remain focused on adults (as opposed to adolescents) and this included documenting separately any studies that had a mix or boundary-line population(s), as opposed to simply including them in a synthesis as they would have been if their population(s) fell directly outside of an adult population.

Documenting these studies during the screening process is important for transparency; many topics, such as platform-specific cyberbullying, will have significantly more developmental activity among adolescent samples than among adult samples.

2.3. Data Extraction and Quality Assessment

The bibliographic metadata extracted from Scopus for this analysis included authors, institutions, titles, abstracts, keywords, year of publication, journal title, and citations. We developed a standard extraction tool to synthesize the digital context of studies that met the inclusion criteria: the theoretical framework; the research methodology; participant demographics; variables measured; associations tested (direction); and primary findings. We used the structured tool to organize the four research questions and ensure consistency between the protocol used to develop the review and the synthesis.

To assess the methodological quality of each study that met the inclusion criteria, we examined six domains: clarity of purpose; appropriateness of methods; quality of data and transparency; transparency of analyses; validity of conclusions; and relevance to the questions asked in this review. We scored each domain on an ordinal scale of 0–2. Quality assessments influenced interpretation but not the decision to include/exclude studies. Lower-quality studies carried less weight than higher-quality studies because they may have lacked methodological clarity or reporting. The study-level scoring matrix is included in the supplementary information.

We developed a codebook to distinguish study attributes from substantive findings. Attributes of studies included year of publication; country or location of study; population; sample size; platform or digital environment in which the study occurred; theoretical frameworks used; study designs employed; and analytical procedures used. Findings related to each variable identified as being related to sexual violence were categorized into three categories: attribute (e.g., age); predictor (whether the variable was viewed as a risk or protective factor); outcome measure (the indicator(s) used to determine sexual violence); and test statistic (whether there was statistical significance). By separating findings regarding what has been studied from findings regarding what is statistically associated with sexual violence, the meta-analysis provides greater clarity and precision regarding both.

2.4. Bibliometric and Thematic Analysis

We also conducted science mapping, including keyword co-occurrence and country co-authorship networks, using the same software (VOSviewer) used for performance analysis. Co-occurrence was analyzed as all possible pairs of keywords with a minimum number of occurrences (2), utilizing "full counting" and strength-normalization. Variants of each keyword were standardized prior to being mapped (i.e., to combine obvious singular/plural forms; to standardize spellings; and/or to use closely equivalent terms). A detailed description of the VOSviewer options used during this process, as well as the cleaning choices made, is provided in the Supplementary Materials.

The systematic review component used thematic synthesis. We coded all theoretically or methodologically relevant descriptors of study findings, grouped them into broad descriptive themes,

and then categorized them at a higher level within an ecological framework. The systematic and bibliometric components were integrated by comparing keyword cluster themes with those identified through manual coding. We also interpreted temporal, geographic, and collaborative patterns among the studies, along with the content of their findings. Since the 15 studies varied substantially in their samples, measurements, and outcomes, a quantitative meta-analysis was not performed.

Thus, we integrated these streams through interpretation rather than statistical methods. For instance, the prominent presence of moral disengagement in the keyword map was evaluated against its frequent mention in the systematic literature. Similarly, geographic clustering of the outputs in the bibliometric stream was viewed against the absence of substantial cross-cultural adult literature. Similarly, collaboration networks were used to identify where research capacity exists geographically, but this did not imply that results from highly interconnected countries should be viewed as valid. Throughout the synthesis, this distinction remained clear so that no substantive conclusions were drawn solely based on frequency of appearance in bibliometrics.

2.5. Methodological Constraints

Design factors constrain how these results should be interpreted. For example, if only articles listed in Scopus were included (and thus excluding studies available in other databases such as Web of Science, PsycINFO, and PubMed, as well as those from specific regions), language and accessibility issues may influence geographic and resource-based sampling. Additionally, this study focused solely on adults; therefore, it excludes a large body of adolescent literature. Moreover, terminology varied, including cyberbullying, cyberaggression, online harassment, and other related concepts. Furthermore, the total systematic corpus is relatively small and reflects methodological heterogeneity. Finally, as with all research, publication bias likely influences whether statistically significant relationships will emerge. We considered these constraints when discussing the findings.

3. Results

The results are presented in two linked streams. The bibliometric analysis addresses the development and structure of the wider research field, while the systematic synthesis focuses on the platforms, theories, methods and multi-level predictors relevant to adult or general-population perpetration.

3.1. Bibliometric Characteristics of Cyberviolence Research

3.1.1. Publication Growth and Geographic Distribution

Publication output increased markedly over the review period, from 199 documents in 2015 to 862 in 2025. The trajectory was modest in 2015–2017, accelerated from 2018 through 2021, and remained high from 2022 onward. This pattern indicates sustained expansion of cyberviolence research, although

publication counts alone do not establish a corresponding increase in theoretical or methodological quality.

Research output was geographically concentrated. Based on the manuscript's Scopus analysis, the United States contributed 1,184 publications, followed by Spain (518), China (494) and the United Kingdom (385). India, Australia, Canada, Italy, Turkey and Germany also appeared among the leading contributors. The concentration of output in North America, Europe and parts of East Asia indicates that the available literature may not represent regional variation in digital norms, legal settings or platform use.

Institutional productivity followed a similar pattern. Universidad de Cordoba, Pennsylvania State University and the University of Toronto were among the highest-output institutions in the dataset, alongside several Spanish universities and institutions in China and the Czech Republic. Because institutional counts are sensitive to affiliation conventions and co-authorship, they are interpreted as indicators of research concentration rather than direct measures of research quality.

The disciplinary distribution was led by psychology (22.5%) and social sciences (22.2%), with substantial contributions from medicine (14.2%) and computer science (12.3%). Engineering and several health-related or applied fields contributed smaller shares. This distribution is consistent with cyberviolence being studied as both a behavioral-social phenomenon and a problem embedded in digital systems.

The distribution of authors and citations further illustrates concentration within the field. The manuscript's Scopus data identified Michelle F. Wright, Sebastian Wachs, Rosario O. Ortega Ruiz, Esther Calvete Zumalde and Rosario Del Rey among the recurrent high-output or highly cited contributors. Citation counts varied considerably across career stage and publication year, so they should not be interpreted as a ranking of evidential quality. More useful for the present review is the substantive concentration of influential work around moral disengagement, cyberbullying measurement, cross-cultural validation, relationship dynamics and intervention research.

The bibliometric results therefore point to a field that has grown quickly but is organized around a relatively stable set of concepts. Growth has not produced an equally broad distribution of research across regions or disciplines. Psychology and social science remain dominant, and the countries with the largest publication volumes also host several of the most visible institutional research groups. Computer science and engineering contribute to the wider literature, yet computational and platform-design perspectives are less prominent in the adult predictor studies that passed the systematic eligibility criteria.

3.1.2. Thematic Structure and Collaboration

Keyword co-occurrence mapping positioned cyberbullying as the central term and identified four broad thematic groupings: core perpetration research, theoretical mechanisms, digital context, and correlates or outcomes. Moral disengagement, empathy and Dark Triad-related constructs formed an important psychological cluster, while social media, online disinhibition and anonymity connected the behavioral

literature to characteristics of digital environments. The presence of cybervictimization and mental-health terms also shows that perpetration research remains closely linked to work on exposure and consequences.

The author-keyword analysis produced a similar structure. Cyberbullying had 116 occurrences and was substantially more frequent than other author-assigned terms; social media, moral disengagement, cyberaggression and cybervictimization were among the recurring concepts. The consistency between the broader keyword map and author keywords suggests a relatively stable vocabulary around core behavioral and psychological themes, despite variation in terminology across subfields.

Country co-authorship analysis showed that the United Kingdom occupied a central collaborative position with 14 links, followed by the United States with 11; Australia and China each had eight. The collaboration network was therefore more geographically distributed than publication volume alone, but regions with comparatively low publication output also remained weakly represented in collaborative ties. This is relevant to the later finding that cross-cultural validation remains limited.

Citation patterns fit a developing field rather than one dominated by a single foundational study. Older publications had more time to accumulate citations, whereas recent studies showed lower raw totals but in some cases higher normalized rates. This temporal effect is important when comparing influence across the 2015–2025 period. The bibliometric analysis therefore identifies visibility and thematic reach, while the systematic synthesis below assesses the content of the predictor evidence.

3.2. Digital Platforms and Contexts (RQ2)

Most systematic evidence treats social media as a general environment rather than examining the platform-specific affordances of each site. Most adult-focused research has used Facebook specifically, while other research uses either the term "social media" or "digital communication at work" more generally. While studies on individual platforms like Snapchat, YouTube, Twitter/X, etc. were found, they did not meet inclusion criteria because they focused on adolescents, leaving a clear platform-specific evidence gap for adults. While the literature recognizes that the digital environment is a contextual factor that shapes cyberbullying, few studies have compared how anonymity, audience composition, persistence, moderation, and algorithmically visible content influence cyberbullying behavior across different social media sites.

Workplace cyberbullying also provides a unique context. In her study of academic staff, Alrawashdeh et al. (2024), found that higher levels of workplace social capital are associated with less involvement in cyberbullying behaviors. The findings provide additional breadth to this review by demonstrating that workplace social capital can be a protective factor against cyberbullying behaviors in adult online spaces. The level of specificity regarding which social media platforms were studied varied widely. Some studies identified a particular platform name, while others referenced social media, Internet usage or workplace Information Communication Technology (ICT). This difference matters because the behavioral implications of anonymity and audience exposure vary greatly depending on whether one

interacts through a public feed, a private messaging group, or a professional communication system. As such, the current body of adult-based evidence is insufficient to develop platform-specific predictor profiles; however, it does demonstrate the lack of systematic comparative analysis as a research gap.

3.3. Theoretical and Methodological Patterns (RQ3)

Bandura's moral disengagement framework was the most frequently used theory in the systematically reviewed literature. In addition to being useful for connecting person-level predisposition with situational factors, the general Aggression Model (GAM) is also a useful approach. The GAM connects person-level variables to situational factors; however, it does not provide an integrated theory of how the two influence each other. The literature provides evidence for many different approaches to understanding digital aggression (e.g., social cognitive theory, the I3 model, social capital theory, and personality models). Although these models address complementary pieces of the same problem, few studies have tested them within a single integrated model. Therefore, the theoretical fragmentation observed in the literature limits direct comparison across studies of mechanisms.

Methodologically, quantitative cross-sectional survey methods predominate. Common statistical techniques include regression, structural equation modeling, and mediation or moderation analyses. Fewer studies have been conducted longitudinally, and few use qualitative or mixed-methods research designs. Sample sizes have varied widely across studies, and several used college students or other convenience samples. Overall, the methodological profile of the existing literature provides sufficient information regarding which factors are associated with digital aggression. However, it provides little evidence on the temporal order of those factors (i.e., did x precede y), whether the identified factors influence one another reciprocally, or what meaning participants assign to their use of digital aggression.

More specifically, Bandura's moral disengagement framework provided more detailed mechanism-specific evidence than any other theory examined. Most studies examining the moral disengagement framework examined some combination of the following mechanisms: moral justification, euphemistic labeling, advantageous comparison, displacement or diffusion of responsibility, distortion of consequences, attribution of blame, and dehumanization. General aggression approaches expand upon this focus by placing moral and personality factors within the context of person-environment interactions. Relational and social capital approaches further extend this scope of inquiry by emphasizing protective resources and social structures. Ultimately, these theories coexist and support integration; however, most current studies examine each one separately.

Similarly, the methodological profiles of the studies examined are similar. Cross-sectional survey designs using regression or correlation analyses were by far the most common methodologies in the existing literature. Structural equation modeling and/or mediation/moderation analyses were used in fewer numbers of studies. Furthermore, long-term longitudinal designs were rare in the existing literature. While advanced statistical techniques can identify associations between variables in cross-sectional data, they cannot establish temporal precedence on their own. Specifically, if an author identifies a

variable (e.g., moral disengagement) as a predictor of another variable (e.g., digital aggression), this often means the authors are reporting statistical prediction, not demonstrated temporal causality.

Table 1
Theoretical Frameworks in Included Studies

Theory	Studies Using Framework	Key Application
Bandura's Moral Disengagement Theory	Nocera et al. (2022); Jeong et al. (2024); Meter et al. (2021); Baltzidis (2024)	Eight mechanisms of moral disengagement predicting cyber aggression
General Aggression Model (GAM)	Baltzidis (2024); Luo et al. (2023); Tennakoon et al. (2024)	Person × situation interactions facilitating cyberbullying
Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory	Meter et al. (2021)	Cognitive autonomy and moral disengagement in cyberaggression
I³ Model	Woerner et al. (2024)	Instigators, impellers, and inhibitors of intimate partner cyber abuse
Social Capital Theory	Alrawashdeh et al. (2024)	Social capital as a protective factor against workplace cyberbullying
Five-Factor Personality Theory	Semerci (2017) - marginal	Big Five traits predicting cyberbullying perpetration

Table 2
Methodological Approaches in the Included Studies

Methodology	Studies	Examples
Cross-sectional survey with correlation/regression	8	Baltzidis (2024); Al-Adamat et al. (2023); Alrawashdeh et al. (2024); Mussap et al. (2023); Betts et al. (2019)
Structural Equation Modelling (SEM)	3	Meter et al. (2021); Arató et al. (2022) - marginal; Tennakoon et al. (2024)
PROCESS macro (mediation/moderation)	2	Baltzidis (2024); Woerner et al. (2024)
Longitudinal survey design	1	Woerner et al. (2024)
Hierarchical regression	1	Jeong et al. (2024)
Systematic Review	1	Arif et al. (2024)
Fuzzy-set QCA	1	Hossain et al. (2022)

3.4. Multi-Level Predictors of Cyberviolence Perpetration (RQ4)

The substantive evidence can be organized across ecological levels. At the individual level, moral disengagement appeared most consistently, with studies also implicating Dark Triad or related personality traits, low affective empathy, callous-unemotional traits, pro-cyberbullying attitudes and, in specific contexts, problem drinking. Moral identity was associated with lower perpetration in the relevant study. These findings do not imply that any single trait is sufficient for perpetration; rather, they identify characteristics that recur within different samples and analytic models.

Relational and organizational evidence was less extensive but pointed to potentially protective conditions. Relationship satisfaction was associated with lower intimate-partner cyber abuse, and family or social-support variables appeared protective in studies coded as marginal to the final adult-focused corpus. In the workplace context, structural and cognitive social capital were associated with lower cyberbullying, with structural social capital showing the stronger relationship in the Jordanian academic sample. These findings suggest that perpetration is shaped partly by the quality and structure of interpersonal environments.

Situational factors centered on online disinhibition, perceived anonymity and reduced social cues. Toxic disinhibition was associated with greater digital aggression, while accountability and self-protective behaviors appeared potentially protective. At the societal level, comparative optimism, cultural context and legal or policy settings were identified less often. The imbalance across levels is itself a result: individual predictors are much better represented than relational, organizational and societal influences (Table 3).

Table 3
Summary of Key Predictors Across Ecological Levels

Level	Key Predictors	Direction	Supporting Studies
Individual			
	Moral Disengagement	Risk	Nocera et al. (2022); Jeong et al. (2024); Meter et al. (2021); Baltzidis (2024)
	Dark Triad Traits	Risk	Gajda et al. (2023); Gholami et al. (2025); Wright et al. (2020)
	Low Affective Empathy	Risk	Baltzidis (2024)
	Callous-Unemotional Traits	Risk	Baltzidis (2024)
	High Self-Compassion (uncompassionate responding)	Risk	Wei et al. (2024) - marginal
	Problem Drinking	Risk	Woerner et al. (2024)
	Moral Identity	Protective	Al-Adamat et al. (2023)
	Self-Esteem	Non-significant	Alrawashdeh et al. (2024)
	Pro-cyberbullying Attitudes	Risk	Mussap et al. (2023)
Relational			
	Relationship Satisfaction	Protective	Woerner et al. (2024)
	Family Cohesion	Protective	Arató et al. (2022) - marginal
	Social Support	Protective	Arató et al. (2022) - marginal
	Workplace Social Capital	Protective	Alrawashdeh et al. (2024)
Organizational			
	Structural Social Capital	Protective	Alrawashdeh et al. (2024)
	Cognitive Social Capital	Protective (weaker)	Alrawashdeh et al. (2024)
	Professional Codes	Protective	Alrawashdeh et al. (2024)
Situational			
	Online Disinhibition	Risk	Joinson (2007); Suler (2004); Wang et al. (2024)
	Perceived Anonymity	Risk	Den Hamer et al. (2013)
	Self-Protective Behaviors	Protective	Vakhitova et al. (2020)

Level	Key Predictors	Direction	Supporting Studies
	Impulsive SNS Use	Risk	Tennakoon et al. (2024)
	Subjective Norms	Moderates CAI	Tennakoon et al. (2024)
Societal			
	Cultural Context	Moderates	Wei et al. (2024) - marginal
	Comparative Optimism	Influences risk perception	Betts et al. (2019)

Within the individual level, moral disengagement was supported across several studies and mechanisms, making it more consistent than any single personality or demographic factor. Dark Triad-related constructs also recurred, although the specific trait showing the strongest association differed across studies. Evidence concerning empathy was more differentiated: affective empathy appeared particularly relevant in the Facebook-focused study, while the literature did not support a simple conclusion that all forms of empathy operate identically. Problem drinking, moral identity and attitudes toward cyberbullying appeared in more specific models and should therefore be interpreted as context-dependent rather than universal predictors.

The relational level contained fewer studies but introduced an important protective perspective. Higher relationship satisfaction buffered intimate-partner cyber abuse in Woerner (2024), while social capital was associated with lower workplace cyberbullying in Alrawashdeh et al. (2024). Family cohesion and support variables appeared in work coded near the margins of the adult inclusion criteria. Although the evidential base is smaller than for individual predictors, these findings indicate that close relationships, and network structure can alter the conditions under which individual risks are expressed.

Situational evidence was dominated by the logic of online disinhibition. Anonymity, reduced social cues and the psychological distance of mediated communication can reduce restraint, but the reviewed studies do not show that anonymity has the same effect in every setting. Perceived severity, virtual empathy and self-protective behaviors also appeared as situationally relevant variables. The societal level was the least developed. Cultural context, comparative optimism and regulatory or policy conditions were identified, but the small number of studies prevent any stable ranking of societal predictors.

3.5. Integrated Results

Three themes are evident across the two types of analyses. First, while academic research on cyberbullying is expanding rapidly, it is still conducted from a relatively small geographic base. Second, psychological mechanisms, specifically moral disengagement, are prominent in both the bibliometric analysis and the systematic review. Finally, the systematic literature reviewed above is dominated by cross-sectional, self-reported studies that pay little attention to how social media platforms function (platform affordance), where bullying occurs (organizational setting), or whether findings vary depending

on culture. These three themes form the foundation for the ecological interpretation discussed in the Discussion section.

4. Discussion

4.1. Principal Interpretation of the Findings

The results of this meta-analysis suggest that engagement in cyberviolence is most appropriately conceptualized as a function of the interplay among various personal and contextual elements rather than solely as a result of a stable, enduring attribute. In particular, moral disengagement is the primary common mechanism across all reviewed research. Moral Disengagement, according to Bandura (1999), refers to how people who commit behavior morally inconsistent with what they normally would do rationalize their actions by changing how they perceive the victim, shifting blame away from themselves, or downplaying the negative impact. Therefore, because moral disengagement was clearly demonstrated in the systematic data collection and also emerged as a prominent component of the keyword frequency data, it appears to have developed as a central conceptual framework for explaining why certain behaviors occur. While there is considerable associative evidence for each variable (e.g., personality/affective; relational/organizational), cross-sectional studies provide little information about whether moral disengagement occurs prior to cyberviolent behavior, if it emerges due to the repetition of engaging in cyber-violent behavior, or if it exists reciprocally with other variables related to cyberviolence.

A second layer of understanding involves examining personality and affective variables. As previously mentioned, multiple studies examined the relationship between callous-unemotional characteristics, dark triad-type traits and low affective empathy on the part of perpetrators of cyberviolence. However, those studies should not be interpreted as providing evidence that those traits causally contribute to the development of cyber-violence. Instead, the General Aggression Model (GAM) is particularly useful here in that it examines behavior as a function of the interaction between a person's variables and environmental stimuli. Cyber-environments can provide users with varying levels of perceived anonymity/social presence/audience size/accountability, thereby either strengthening or weakening pre-existing tendencies. Thus, future research would benefit from investigating those interactions more thoroughly.

Finally, relational and organizational variables complicate a sole focus on the individual explanations discussed above. For example, lower levels of relationship satisfaction, social support, workplace social capital have been shown to decrease rates of cyberviolence perpetration and or serve as a protective factor against the influence of other perpetration-related variables. Although workplace variables are particularly salient in an adult-focused review because they show how cyber-violence can occur within professional relationships, organizations, codes of conduct, evidence on these variables likely differs significantly from evidence from student populations and varies across industrial sectors and cultural settings.

Although the finding regarding moral disengagement is significant at a theoretical level because it links relatively stable dispositions to context-specific behavior, an individual high in manipulativeness or callousness may still need cognitive justification to turn disposition into harmful behavior. Furthermore, an environment where diffusion of responsibility or consequences is inherent may facilitate how easily an individual develops such justification. Such a sequence is theoretically plausible; however, the reviewed literature rarely examined that process longitudinally. Therefore, future models must explicitly differentiate between trait-like vulnerability, cognitive mechanisms, situational triggers rather than viewing them interchangeably.

Similarly, low affective empathy may decrease awareness of an individual's suffering; conversely, cognitive empathy can enable an individual to understand another's perspective even though he/she does not experience the emotional connection associated with such understanding. The available studies do not justify an unqualified "empathy deficit" model. Further refinement of empathic measures could identify whether certain components of empathy operate independently, interact with moral disengagement, or vary by type(s) of cyberviolence.

4.2. An Integrated Ecological Framework

The results provide evidence for an ecological (or multi-level) conceptualization of predictor factors that occur at different levels, including individual, relational, situational, organizational, and societal levels. The framework displayed in Fig. 9 is not offered as a statistically supported causal model. Rather, it compiles relationships identified across studies that varied significantly in design and were analyzed using diverse methodologies. The purpose was to explicitly define the levels at which future models would need to be examined. The levels include personality, moral reasoning, and emotional/affective processing (individual); intimate, family, peer, and supportive relationships (relational); the context created by the use of anonymous online platforms/online disinhibition/affordance created by these platforms (situational); workplace social capital; and professional standards/norms (organizational); and the influence of culture, regulation/policy on behavior (societal).

This framework's advantage is that it makes interactions among elements testable. Moral disengagement may mediate relations between dispositional risk factors and cybervictimization (or other forms of cybercrime); online disinhibition may strengthen those same relations under certain digital conditions; and supportive relationships or organizational social capital can weaken them. A cultural context may also influence how meaningful or powerful each of these connections is. Each of the above propositions needs empirical testing. Ideally, this would occur using longitudinal, experimental, or multi-level study designs.

An additional benefit of the ecological model is that it highlights the disproportionate representation of individual-level variables in research. Individual-level variables are easier to collect data on through surveys and have therefore been much more frequently represented in the literature. Collecting relational, organizational, and societal influences typically requires larger, more complex sample sizes and multi-level data. Therefore, their under-representation does not necessarily mean they matter less. Rather, an

evidence gap was created in part by the research methodologies used. To examine this framework, researchers will need to develop studies that connect individuals' responses to relationship characteristics, platform conditions, organizational climates, or national contexts.

In addition to providing a developmental interpretation, we should remain cautious. While the adult-focused literature includes emerging adults, general adult samples, and workplace populations, it provides no longitudinal life-course design. As such, findings related to university students cannot be directly applied to mid-life or older adults. Excluding samples of people younger than 18 years old prevents direct developmental comparison. Thus, adult cyberviolence should be considered as a group of different contexts at all ages (i.e., not just one).

4.3. Methodological Implications

There are many issues with the research methodology used in this body of evidence. Probably the biggest issue is the overwhelming number of cross-sectional surveys (a snapshot at one time) in the evidence base. These designs allow researchers to see if variables go together but can't determine which variable comes first (temporal order). To show causality, persistence over time, and reciprocal influences, researchers need multi-wave longitudinal studies.

Another problem is how little research has considered social media as separate sociotechnical environments. Research usually refers to all of these sites as "social media," but there are many differences between them (i.e., some sites are anonymous, others visible, some have moderators, etc.) and there is no reason to think that what predicts behavior on one site will be predictive on another. Thus, platform-specific and comparative research would provide a better foundation for understanding whether predictors apply across environments or are only applicable given certain design features.

Sampling methods and measurement methods limit generalizability. Often, researchers use university students and convenience samples, while older adults, occupational groups, and populations outside developed countries receive little attention. Definitions of terms like cyber violence, cyberbullying, cyber aggression, and other related constructs also vary widely, as do measurement periods and tools. Standardizing conceptual and measurement frameworks would improve comparisons but should not preclude using context-sensitive measurements that reflect the variability in forms of digital harm across cultures and contexts.

This review also illustrates a methodological point about the use of bibliometric mapping and systematic synthesis. Both methods answer different types of questions. While bibliometric mapping can illustrate growth, concentration, collaboration, and thematic structure, it provides no information on the quality or direction of empirical results. A systematic synthesis can examine substantive findings more closely but is limited by the quantity and quality of the available corpus. Therefore, the value added from integrating bibliometric mapping and systematic synthesis is best realized when both retain their respective roles as independent sources of evidence.

Finally, qualitative work in this area remains limited. Surveys are effective for assessing associations among predetermined constructs but fail to capture how offenders interpret humor, conflict, retaliation, anonymity, and appropriate behavior. Qualitative interviews, digital ethnography, and mixed-method designs can help explain how similar behaviors can take on different meanings across platforms and relationships. They may also identify mechanisms not reflected in current scales, especially within cultural contexts where the language of cyberbullying does not represent the predominant ways to describe digital harm.

This area of study would also benefit from greater transparency in reporting non-significant findings. Publication bias can create an exaggerated perception of consistency in results when more frequent publication of significant predictors makes them appear consistently significant across studies, whereas non-significant predictors may never see the light of day. Reporting all non-significant associations systematically, preregistering confirmatory models, and sharing data files will help distinguish consistent predictors from those that persist simply because they are examined so often.

4.4. Implications for Prevention, Platforms and Organizations

Several areas were identified in the data for developing preventive research; however, the current body of knowledge was deemed insufficient to support specific recommendations regarding efficacy. Because these factors recur throughout the literature and represent a theoretically supported process, moral disengagement, empathic responsiveness, and disinhibitory responses through media are plausible targets for intervention. For example, interventions might investigate the impact of increasing users' perspective-taking abilities (e.g., empathy), promoting moral reasoning, increasing perceived responsibility via accountability measures (e.g., "you posted this"), or incorporating education about responsible behavior ("digital citizenship") into platforms to decrease the likelihood of engaging in harmful behavior. For such interventions to be adopted broadly and implemented at scale, it would be important to conduct experimental validation before adoption.

Similarly, while design considerations related to platform development may reduce disinhibited behaviors by increasing accountability, providing clearer social cues, improving reporting processes, or adding friction before posting potentially damaging content, such modifications may present privacy or safety trade-offs, particularly for vulnerable populations. Thus, the review supports considering design modifications rather than a one-size-fits-all recommendation on implementing real-name policies or any particular moderation model.

Within organizations, evidence on social capital suggests that prevention strategies need not focus solely on individual employee training. Clearly articulated and enforced codes of conduct, reporting mechanisms employees trust and feel safe using, positive working relationships with colleagues and supervisors, and a positive organizational culture may all contribute to reducing workplace cyberbullying. While Alrawashdeh et al. (2016) suggest a relationship between social capital and workplace cyberbullying in the Jordanian higher-education context they examined, establishing whether this finding

generalizes beyond sector or organization type or country requires comparative organizational-based research before drawing broadly applicable conclusions.

When interpreting results practically, it is essential to differentiate between modifiable mechanisms and established intervention targets. While moral disengagement and online disinhibition are theoretically modifiable, the reviewed studies generally establish associations with these variables and do not demonstrate direct intervention effect(s). Similarly, although an inverse relationship has been demonstrated between social capital and workplace cyberbullying, whether programs designed to enhance social capital will similarly reduce workplace cyberbullying perpetration remains an open question. Therefore, researchers conducting intervention studies must clearly identify the mechanism they seek to modify, include relevant control groups, and assess behavioral outcome(s) longitudinally.

Regarding platform development, the most reasonable conclusion from the findings presented here is that platform designers should evaluate their design decisions within the overall causal context in which their product is used and should not treat them as a passive background factor. Anonymity, visibility, duration of information availability, the number of individuals involved in interactions, and moderator activity can each affect both perceived accountability and the consequences users perceive. Designers' ability to study their products as part of larger longitudinal designs (either through randomized controlled trials or quasi-experimental methods using pre-post comparisons where platforms have changed their policies) could allow for stronger evidence supporting the effectiveness of various safety initiatives than the available cross-sectional self-report data.

4.5. Limitations and Research Priorities

The review depends upon a Scopus search for freely available English-language literature, which likely omitted potentially useful literature. The review focused on an adult-only perspective, and as such excluded nearly all evidence from adolescents and other developmental stages. Thus, the review cannot adequately consider all possible developmentally based stages. Additionally, the search strategy may not capture studies that used varying terms for harm caused by technology. Because study definitions, populations, and measures differ, meta-analysis was limited. Concerns remain about publication bias and the use of self-reporting or convenience sampling. Future studies should be conducted in ways that allow causal inference (longitudinal, experimental, quasi-experimental). Furthermore, mixed-methods research could help provide a better understanding of perpetrators' perceptions and contexts. Comparative platform studies could help determine whether certain features (such as anonymity or moderation) contribute to the level of harmful behavior exhibited.

There is also a necessity to increase both population and geographic representation. Future studies should include occupational groups, older adults, relationship dynamics, and non-university-based samples. Cultural representation is currently limited in the Middle East, Africa, and Latin America. In addition, studies completed within the MENA region would enable researchers to assess if constructs such as moral disengagement and empathy function similarly across cultures and do not assume Western constructs apply directly. International collaboration and data sharing would strengthen the

evidence base for this area of research. Priorities include improving design(s), conducting platform-specific analyses, increasing sample size(s), cross-culturally validating measures, clarifying the measurement process(es), and assessing multi-level interactions rather than simply associating one variable with another. The bibliometric dataset provides a broad overview of the field; however, numerous adolescent and technology studies were excluded due to scope differences rather than contradictory findings. Both datasets represent two separate yet related bodies of evidence. Although this review utilized accurate screening, coding, and metadata collection processes, as well as documented the entire process in detail (including search strategies, logs, decisions made at each step of the process, forms used to document quality assessment, and bibliometric data), this allows for verification and updating of the review.

5. Conclusion

This systematic review analyzed the literature to evaluate the effects of cyberviolence on adults. The bibliography indicates an increase in publications on cyberviolence, and most focus on a handful of nations and major universities and research centers. Many of the focus topics included in the publications include cyberbullying prevalence rates, the moral and psychological variables that contribute to cyberviolence, as well as contextual variables related to the digital environment. A systematic review by the authors identifying factors associated with cyberviolence perpetrated against adults found that primary factors include moral disengagement, psychopathic personality traits, online disinhibition, and workplace social capital, many of which were interrelated but not necessarily causal. Because virtually all the studies reviewed were cross-sectional, the researchers found it difficult to determine whether these variables cause or result from cyberviolence. In addition to platform-specific adult studies being relatively scarce, there has been little research examining relational or societal-level factors contributing to adult cyberviolence. The authors proposed a conceptual ecological model of cyberviolence among adults to inform future research. Specifically, they suggested areas of interaction for empirical research to better understand how different levels interact to create cyberviolence. To further enhance our understanding of the causes of cyberviolence, the authors recommended that future research use longitudinal and mixed-methods designs when studying cyberviolence. Additionally, the authors believed that developing clear definitions of what constitutes cyberviolence, assessing differences in platform usage, using diverse samples, and evaluating cross-cultural predictors will allow a clearer determination of the temporal relationship between the variables studied and ultimately assist in determining causality and identifying effective interventions to reduce or prevent cyberviolence. By employing more rigorous research methodologies, the authors believe researchers will be able to examine the above-mentioned issues across different contexts.

Declarations

Author Contribution

S.M. A-F. conceptualized the study and designed the review protocol, performed the bibliometric analysis and visualization and conducted the systematic literature search. S.M. and M.N. conducted the screening, and data extraction, performed the quality assessment , contributed to the thematic synthesis. S.M. wrote the main manuscript text and prepared all tables and figures. M.S. , N.S and A.M critically revised the manuscript for important intellectual content. All authors reviewed and approved the final manuscript.

Ethical Approval

This article does not contain any studies with human participants performed by any of the authors. Ethical approval was therefore not required.

Informed Consent

This article does not contain any studies with human participants performed by any of the authors. Informed consent was therefore not applicable.

Data Availability

The materials supporting this bibliometric and systematic review are provided with the revised submission as supplementary files for editorial and peer-review purposes. These materials should include the completed PRISMA 2020 checklist and flow diagram, the full Scopus search strategy, the bibliographic dataset used for the bibliometric analyses, title, abstract and full-text screening records with reasons for exclusion, structured data-extraction and quality-assessment records, synthesis tables, and the analytical files and parameters used for bibliometric mapping. No primary participant data or personally identifiable information were collected or analyzed in this study.

Competing interests

The authors declare no competing interests regarding the publication of this article.

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Figures

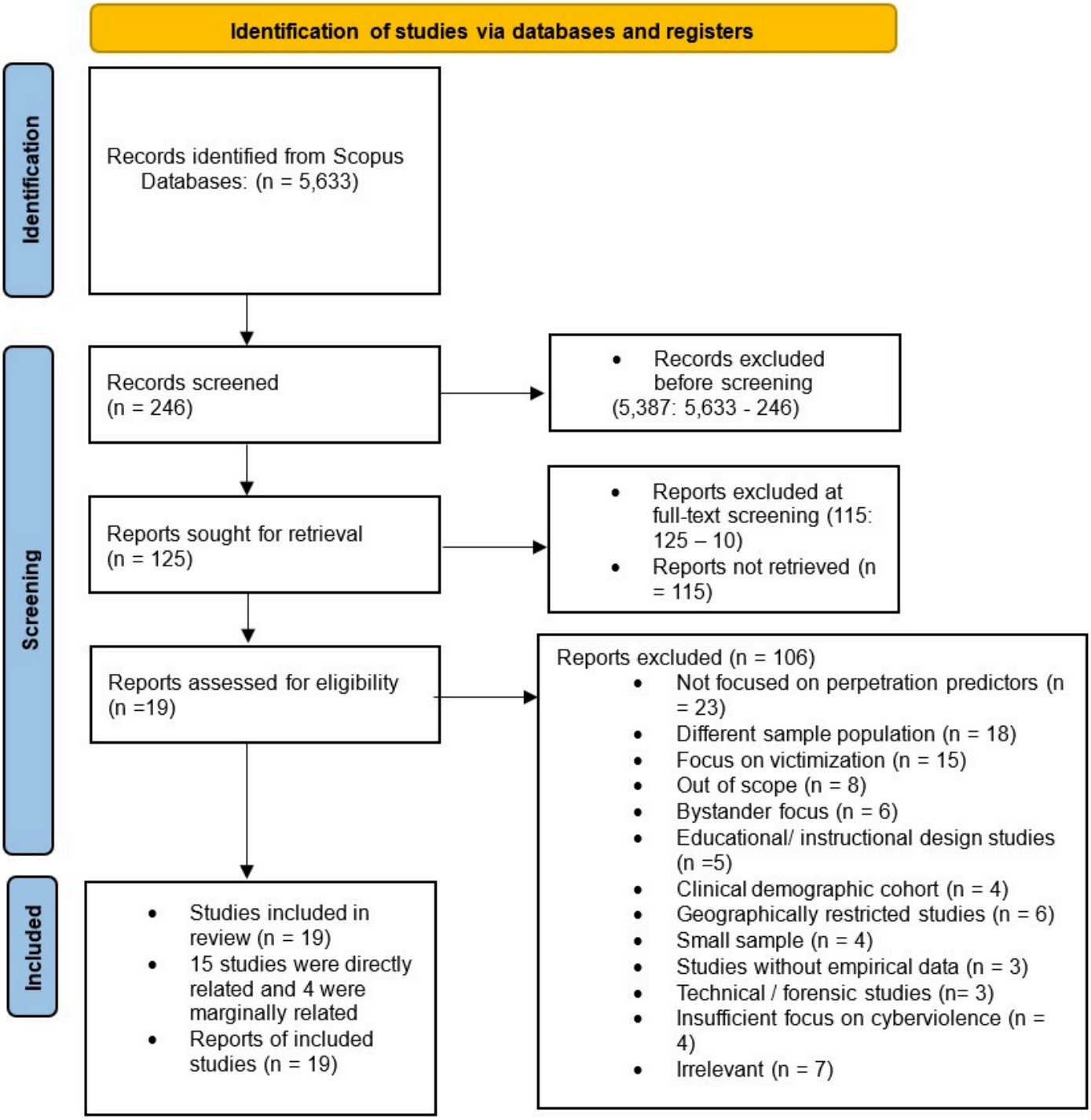


Figure 1

PRISMA 2020 Flow Diagram for Systematic Review of Cyberviolence Predictors (Page et al., 2021).

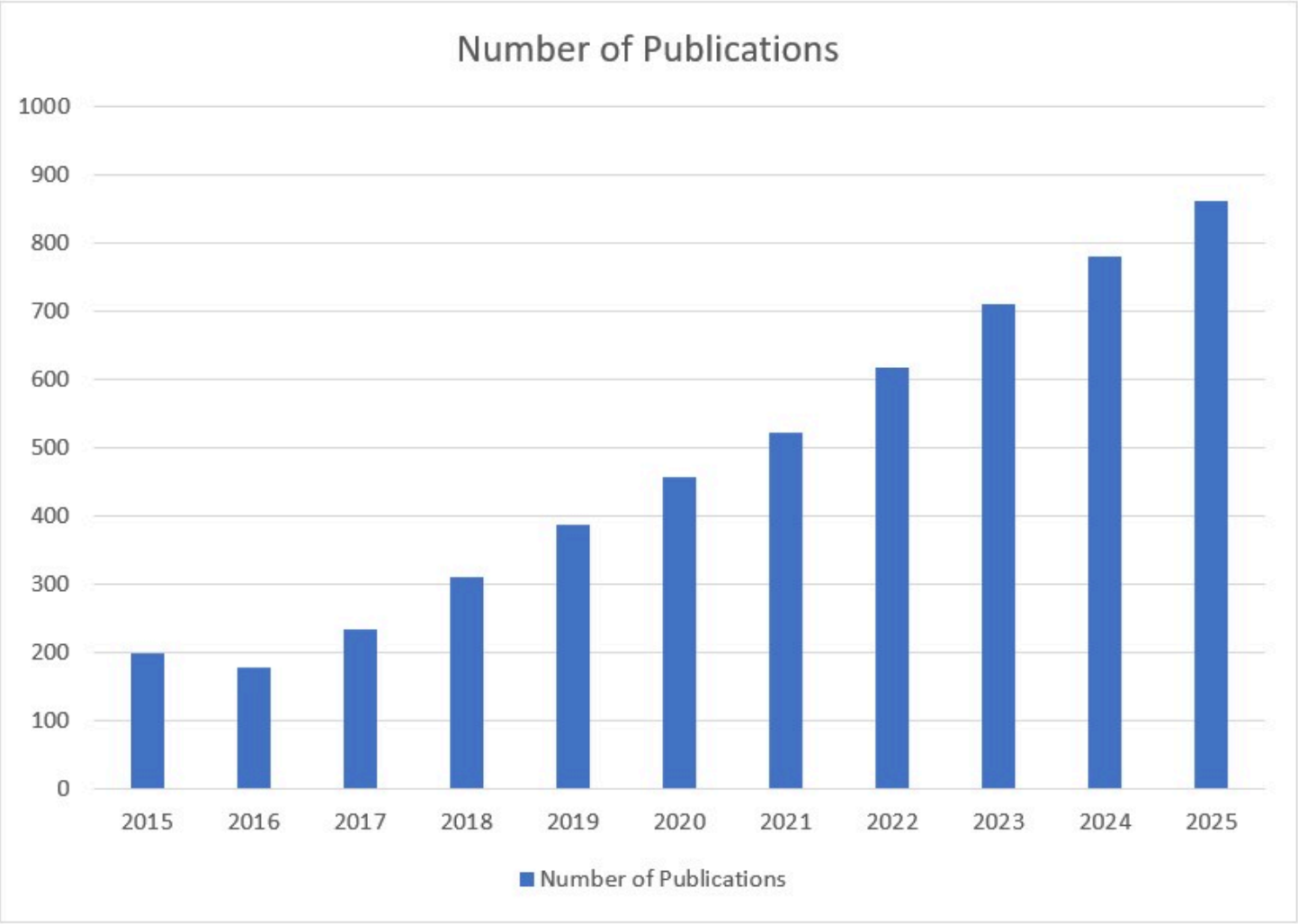


Figure 2

Annual Scientific Production in Cyberviolence Research (2015–2025)

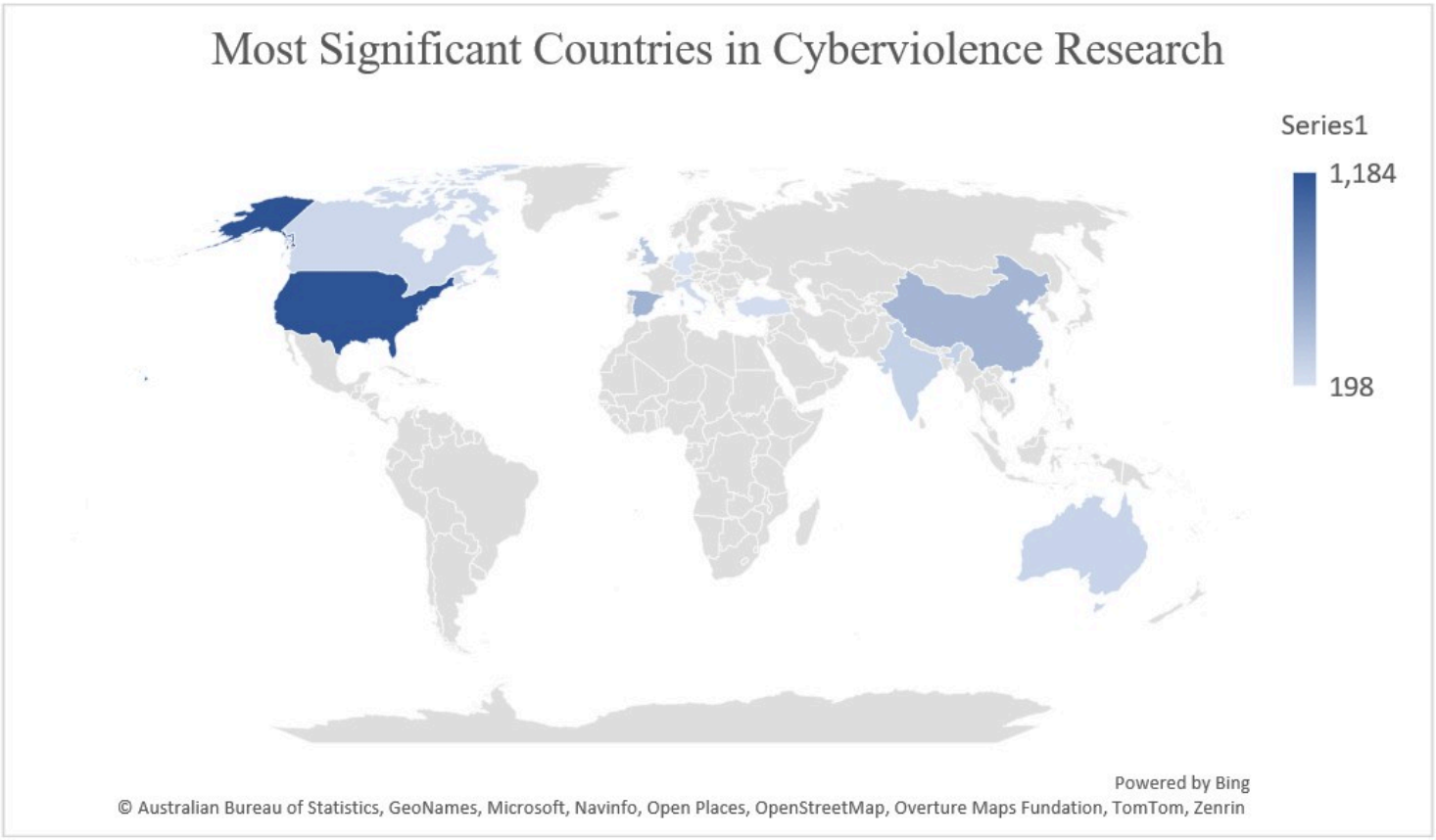


Figure 3

Most Significant Countries in Cyberviolence Research

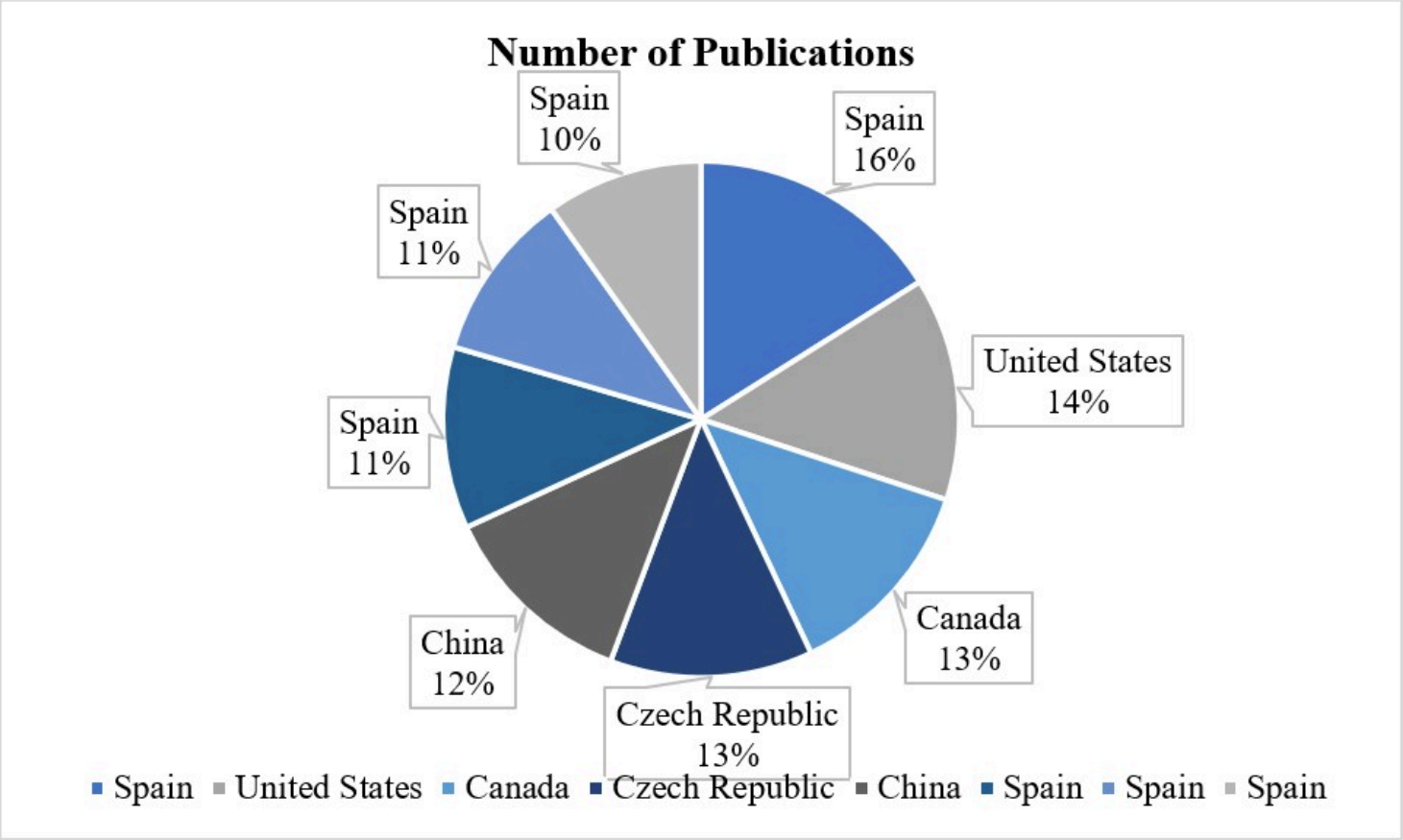


Figure 4

Leading Educational Institutions in Cyberviolence Research

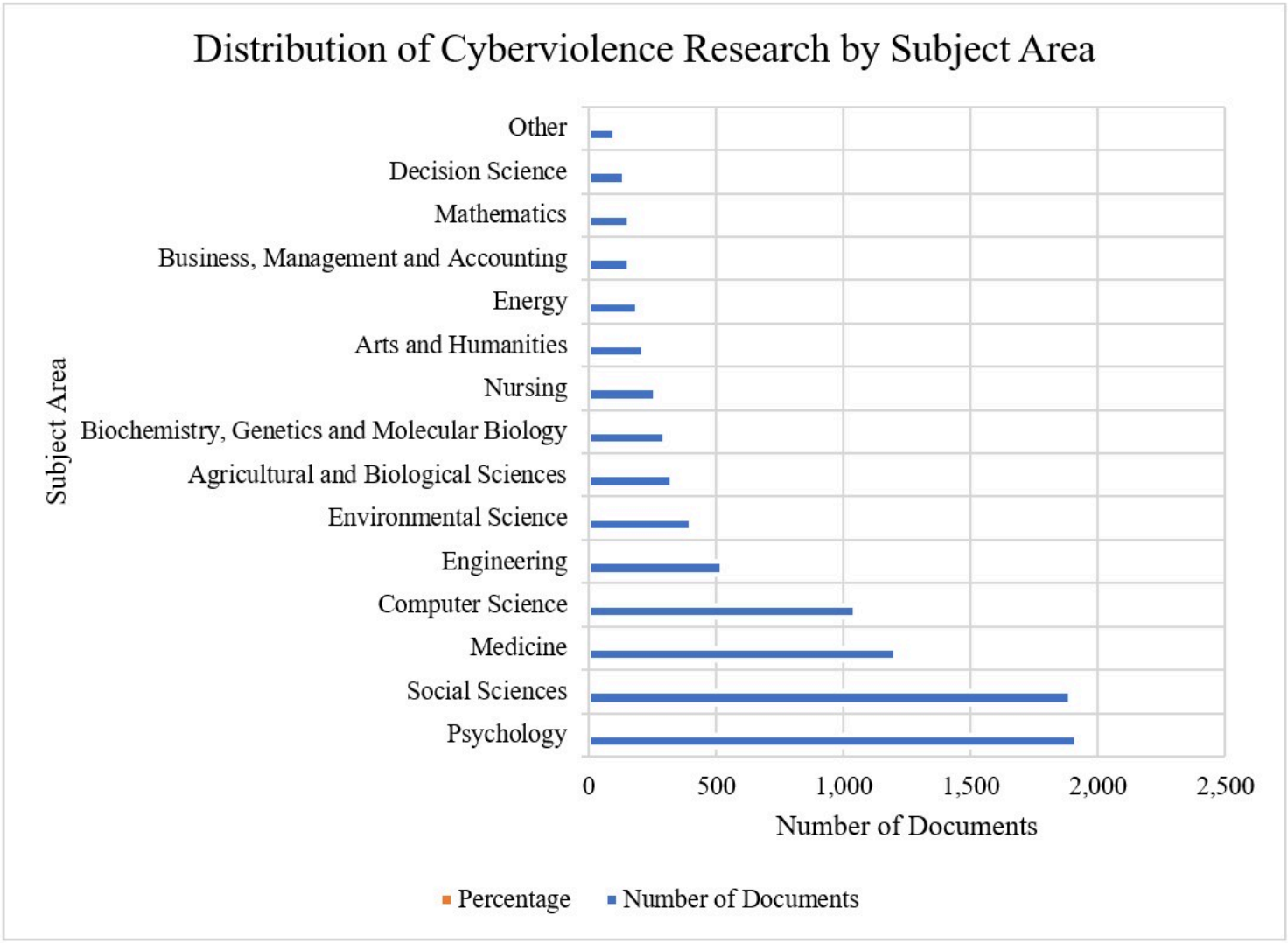


Figure 5

Distribution of Cyberviolence Research by Subject Area

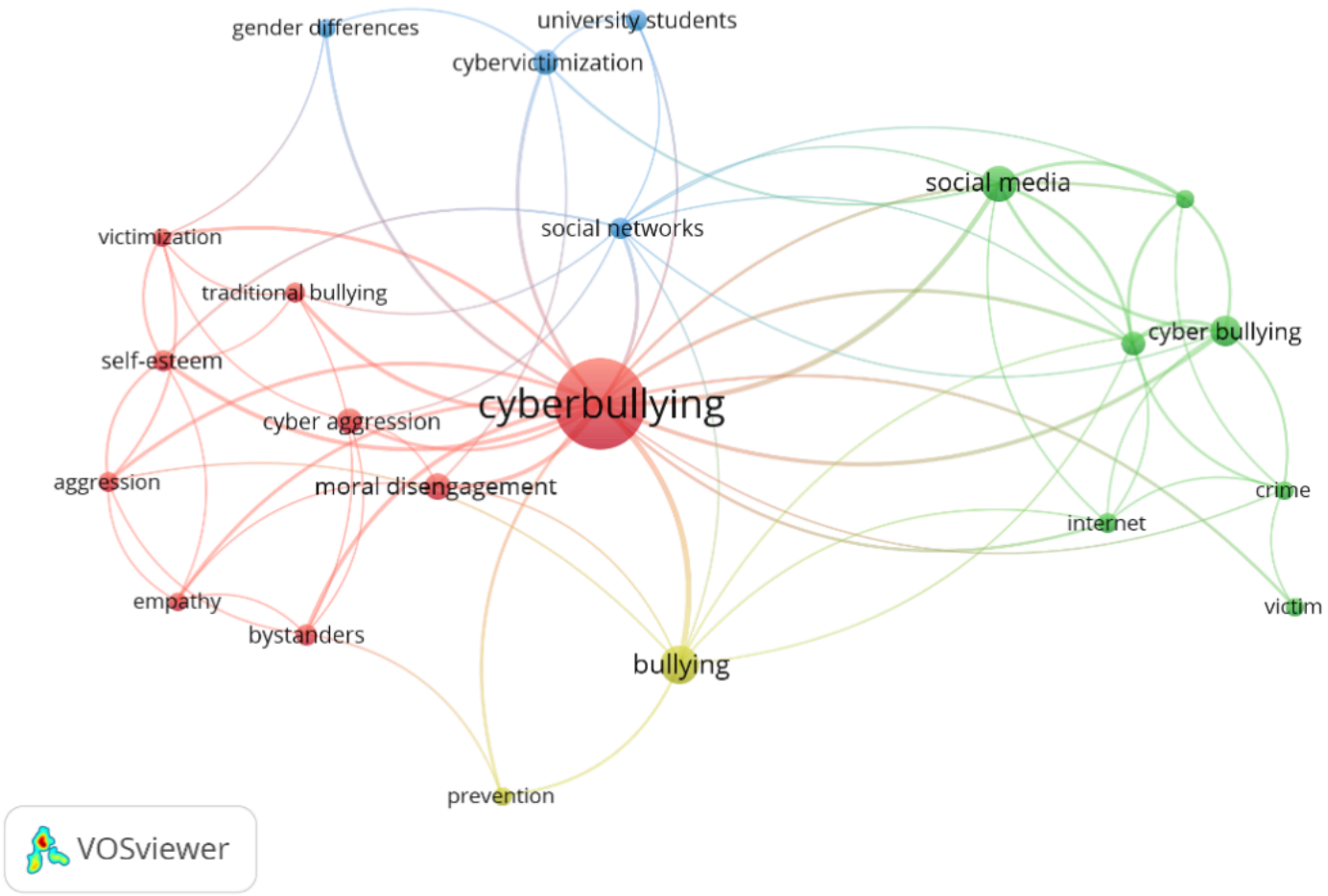


Figure 6

Co-Occurrence Network Analysis of All Keywords

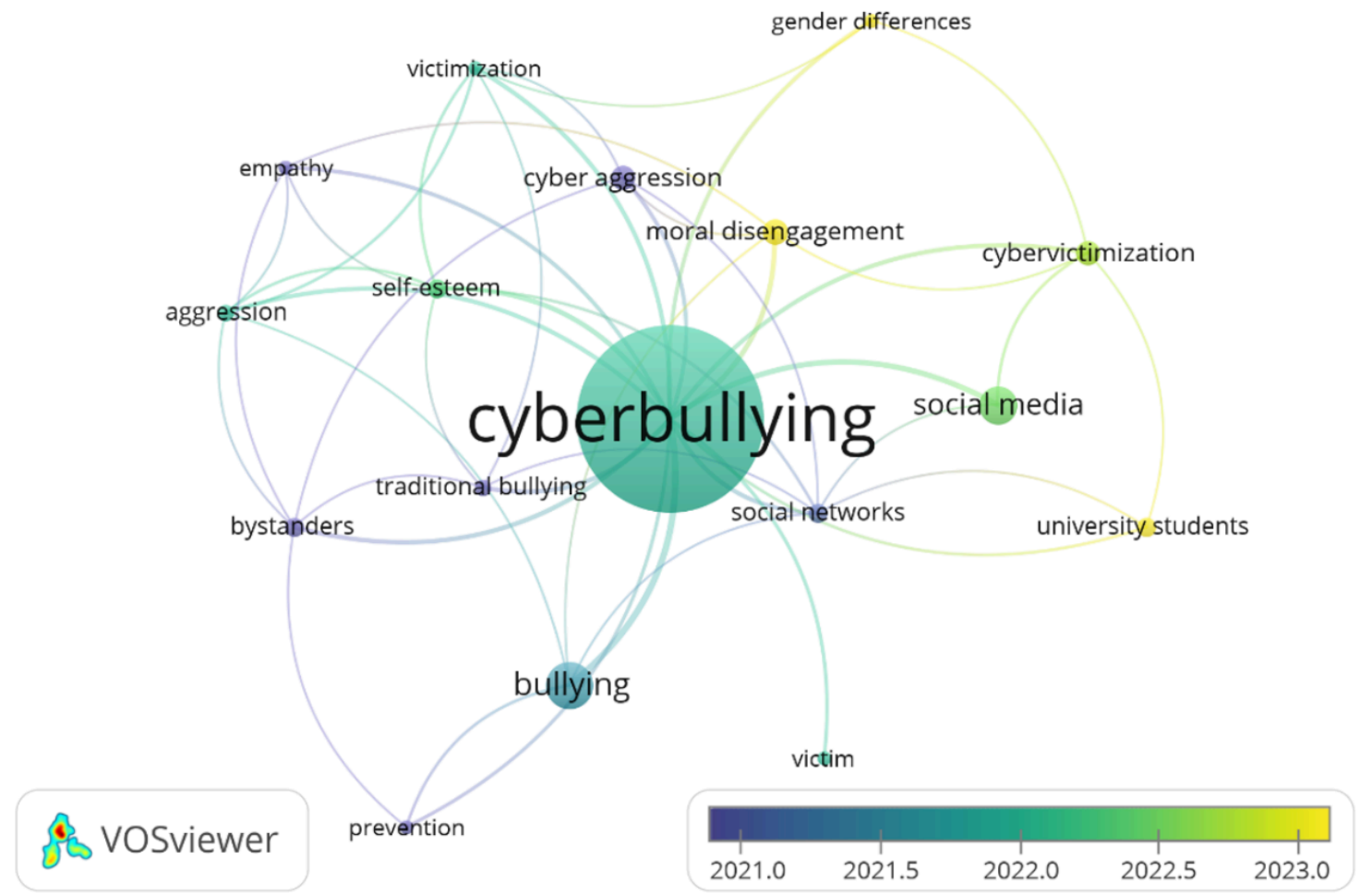


Figure 7

Co-Occurrence Network Analysis of Author Keywords

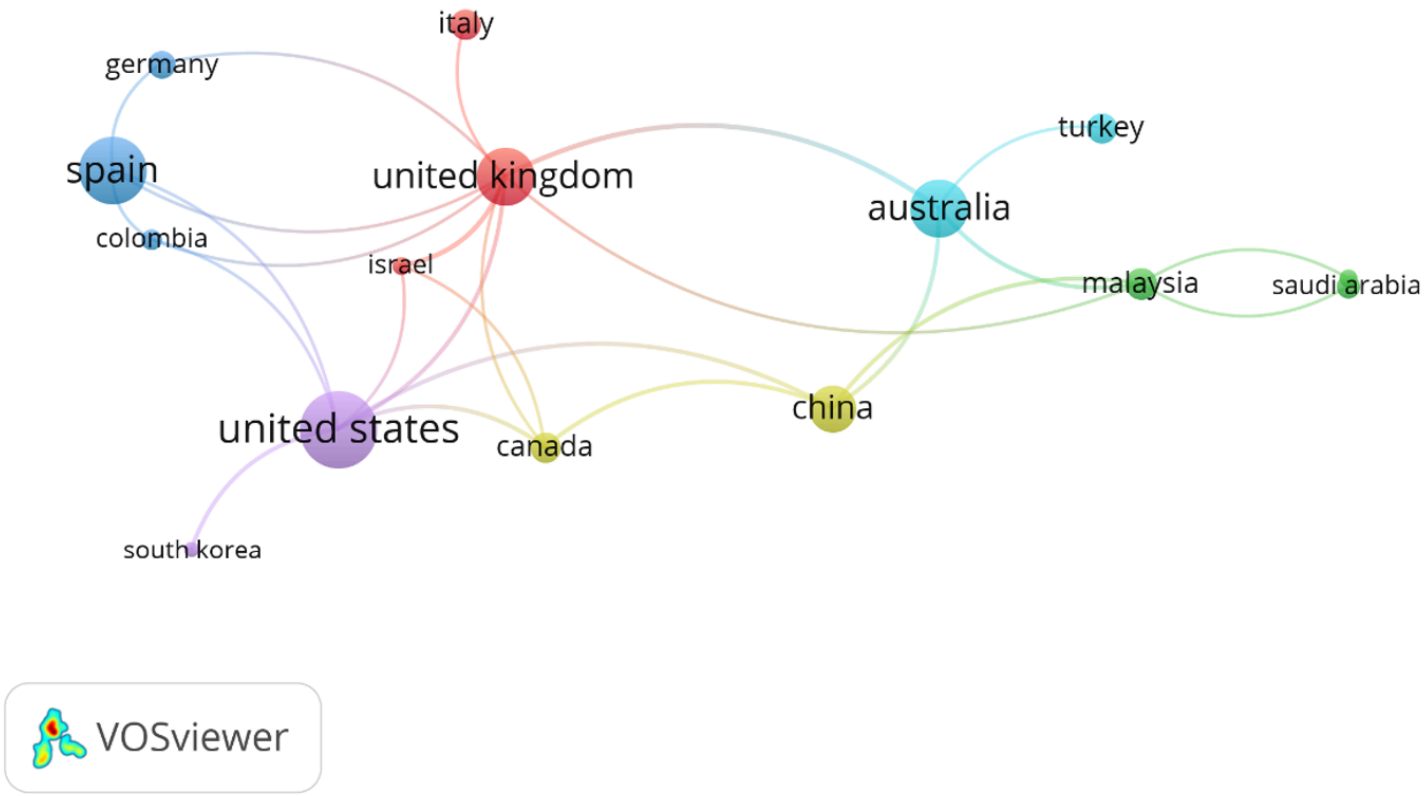


Figure 8

Co-Authorship Network by Country

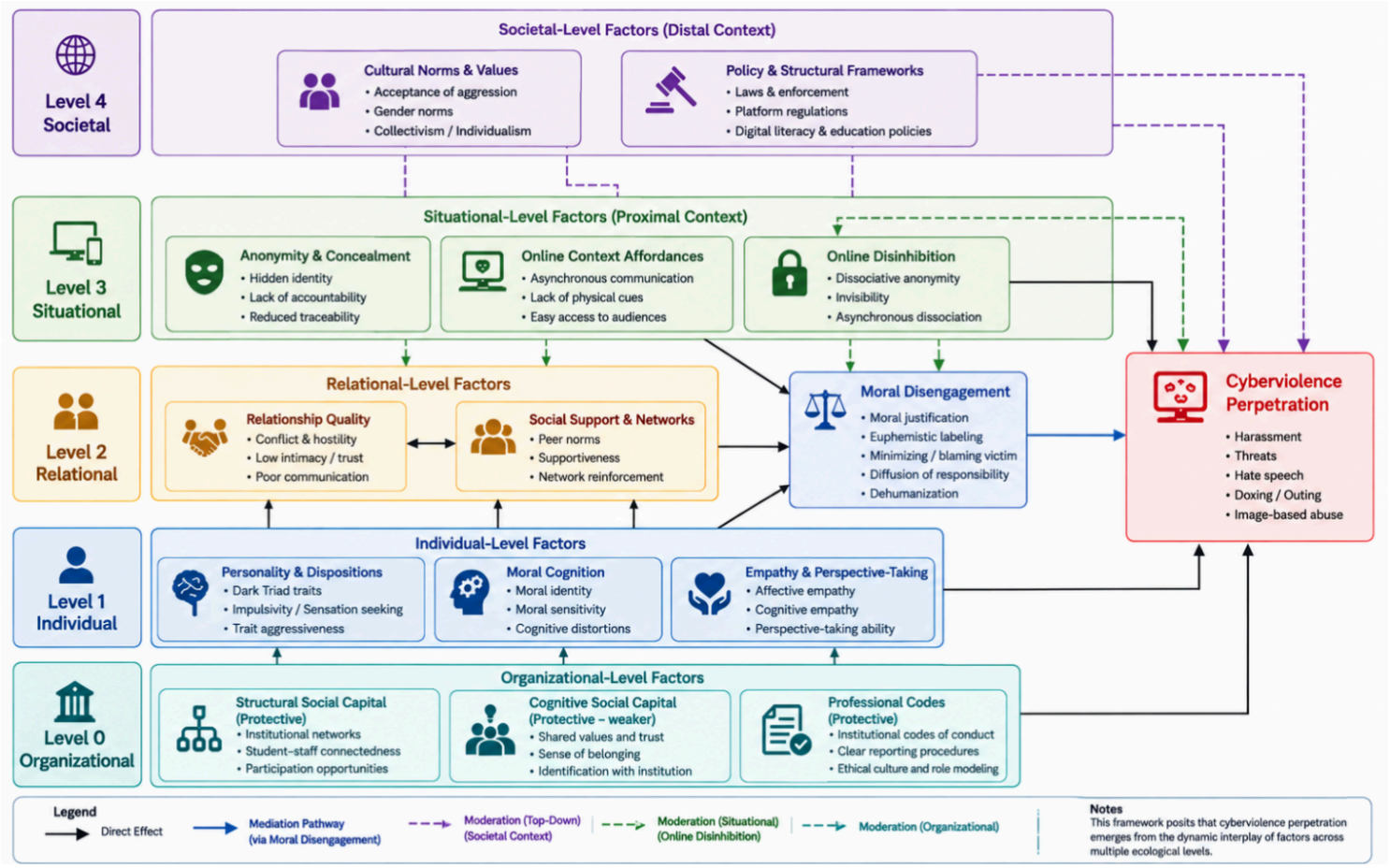


Figure 9

Proposed Integrated Ecological Framework for Cyberviolence Perpetration

Supplementary Files

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- ResearchAppendix.docx