

Cyberbullying Against Educators and School Personnel: Prevalence, Sources, and Associations with Psychological Distress and Occupational Outcomes

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Abstract

Research on school violence has focused on aggression between students, yet cyberbullying targeting school personnel is an increasing concern. Guided by ecological systems theory, in this study, we examined the prevalence, sources, and outcomes of cyberbullying among U.S. pre-K–12 school personnel. A national online survey of 10,340 teachers, administrators, and school staff assessed cyberbullying experiences, aggressor type, psychological distress, and transfer and quit intentions. Overall, 13% of respondents reported experiencing cyberbullying, with administrators reporting the highest prevalence (33%). Although parents/guardians and students were the most common aggressors (52%–59%), cyberbullying by colleagues (22%) and administrators (14%) was also common. Linear regression analyses showed cyberbullying predicted higher psychological distress and transfer and quit intentions, highlighting cyberbullying as a serious occupational stressor requiring organizational and policy-level interventions to support staff well-being and retention.

Introduction

Schools are vital environments for promoting safe and supportive learning and development. Traditionally, research on school safety has focused on students' experiences of aggression (Lester et al., 2017; Robers et al., 2010); however, school educators, such as teachers, administrators, school psychologists, social workers, counselors, and support staff are also targets of verbal, physical, and property-based violence, which can undermine both their well-being and the quality of education (De Vos & Kirsten, 2015; McMahon, Worrell, et al., 2024; Yang, 2021). Teacher experiences with violence have increasingly become examined, yet there is a dearth of research on other school personnel. Longobardi et al. (2019) conducted a meta-analysis of 24 international studies and found that between 20% and 75% of teachers reported experiencing violence from students, underscoring the pervasiveness of teacher victimization. The prevalence of teacher victimization raises concerns as an empirical study has documented serious consequences, including higher anxiety and stress, symptoms of post-traumatic stress, sleep disturbances, and challenges in personal relationships (De Vos & Kirsten, 2015). Understanding these dynamics is essential for creating safe schools that not only protect students but also support the educators who sustain them.

Cyberbullying

Research on school violence has traditionally focused on incidents occurring within school settings, including physical, verbal, and property-related aggression directed at students and teachers (McMahon et al., 2014). However, the rise of digital technologies has expanded the scope of school violence beyond physical spaces, giving rise to the possibility of online forms of aggression. Cyberbullying is formally defined as willful and repeated harm inflicted through the use of computers, cell phones, or other electronic devices (Hinduja & Patchin, 2014). Research on cyberbullying has largely focused on student-to-student interactions in school contexts (e.g., Burton & Leoschut, 2013). While this body of work has advanced our understanding of peer cyberbullying among youth, comparatively little research has examined cyberbullying directed at educators (Moon, McCluskey & Saw, 2024; Young et al., 2017).

In recent years, public incidents have drawn attention to educators as targets of online attacks. For instance, in a Pennsylvania school district, middle school students created more than 20 fake TikTok accounts impersonating teachers and posting sexually explicit, racist, and homophobic content, ultimately targeting about a quarter of the faculty (Hernandez, 2024). Such cases highlight that cyberbullying against teachers is a growing social issue that undermines educators' professional and emotional well-being. As technology continues to advance, the nature and manifestation of cyberbullying have become increasingly diverse. With the widespread adoption of smartphones and their constant presence in daily life, individuals can now engage in online aggression through a variety of channels, including social media comments, video posts, photo sharing, and email. Likewise, with the rise of artificial intelligence (AI) image and video generation that can fabricate visuals of students or educators with startling accuracy, there are added technological threats that make holistic prevention of cyberbullying even more urgent.

Foley and colleagues (2015) examined teacher-directed cyber-harassment in a sample of 5,731 public school teachers in Kentucky and found that less than 10% of teachers reported experiencing some form of email-based cyber-harassment during their career. Targets of cyberbullying were significantly more likely to be younger, teach in middle or high schools (compared to elementary schools), and work in schools with larger enrollments. Bounds and Jenkins (2018) found that 6% of 117 respondents experienced cyber-harassment perpetrated by parents in the 4 to 6 months preceding the survey. Moon, McCluskey and Saw (2024) reported that between 6% and 22% of teachers experienced cyberbullying from students or parents; among those who reported cyberbullying, 36% described their experiences as "serious" or "very serious," and 21% reported severe emotional distress as a result. Additionally, teacher-targeted cyberbullying was associated with higher work-related stress, increased intent to leave the profession, and diminished job effectiveness, suggesting that the consequences extend beyond individual distress to affect educators' professional lives and workforce stability.

International researchers have examined the prevalence of teacher-targeted cyberbullying across diverse educational and cultural contexts. In a national survey of Czech teachers ($n = 5,136$), about 22% reported having experienced a cyber-attack (cyberbullying and cyberharassment), and 3.5% of these teachers reported incidents persisting for longer than one week within the past 12 months (Kopecký & Szotkowski, 2017). In a comparative study including teachers from China and the United States, Qiao and Patterson (2021) reported cyberbullying victimization rates of 22% and 20%, respectively, indicating comparable prevalence despite substantial differences in educational systems and sociocultural contexts. Research conducted in Turkey highlights the prominent role of parents in online harassment. For example, Küçüksüleymanoğlu (2019) found that 75% of teachers in their sample reported experiencing non-face-to-face harassment from parents, pointing to parents as a significant, yet often overlooked, source of cyber aggression against teachers. Qualitative evidence from other national contexts further suggests that colleagues may also act as aggressors. For example, a qualitative study in Nepal documented cases of online sexual harassment perpetrated not only by students but also by fellow teachers (Rajbhandari & Rana, 2023). Thus, the prevalence of cyberbullying against teachers from a range of aggressors is beginning to be acknowledged and investigated around the world.

International research has also begun to assess the impact of teacher-targeted cyberbullying on teacher well-being, particularly through qualitative investigations. In South Africa, Bester and colleagues (2017) reported that teachers who experienced cyberbullying described severe emotional distress, including anxiety, anger, intense humiliation, family stress, and a profound sense of lost dignity. Similarly, teachers in Nepal reported feeling devalued, discouraged, unappreciated, and dejected as a result of online harassment (Rajbhandari & Rana, 2023). These findings underscore the emotional toll and threats to teacher well-being that result from cyberbullying. However, much of the existing evidence regarding non-student aggressors and well-being outcomes is derived from a few qualitative or relatively small-sample studies conducted outside the United States. As a result, the prevalence and impact of cyberbullying by non-student aggressors remain largely unexplored in U.S. research using a national sample.

Theoretical Framework

This study is guided by Bronfenbrenner's (1977) ecological systems theory, with a primary focus on the microsystem and mesosystem. The microsystem involves the school environment in which educators and school personnel are embedded daily. This includes routine interactions within the school setting, such as relationships with students, colleagues, administrators, and school staff. Cyberbullying at the microsystem level can reflect hostile or harmful digital interactions that occur within the context of these school-based relationships. Although cyberbullying can occur outside the physical school setting, it frequently extends into school settings. As such, examining interactions among various stakeholders within the school microsystem remains essential for understanding how cyberbullying unfolds. The mesosystem includes interactions between the school microsystem and other settings outside of the school such as family context. Interactions between school personnel and parents or guardians represent mesosystem processes through which conflict, dissatisfaction, or misunderstandings across contexts may give rise to cyberbullying. Thus, from a social-ecological theory standpoint cyberbullying can emerge within the school microsystem as well as school-family mesosystem interactions, underscoring how educators and school personnel may be exposed to cyberbullying from multiple sources and ecological levels of influence. This approach moves beyond individual-level explanations and situates cyberbullying within the broader relational ecology of schools, providing a conceptual foundation for examining its associations with well-being and career-related outcomes.

This study was also guided by the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model (Demerouti et al., 2001), which explains the potential associations between cyberbullying and educators' well-being by situating cyberbullying experience as a job demand. According to Demerouti et al. (2001), job demands are aspects of the work environment that require ongoing effort and may contribute to employee strain when they exceed one's available resources. For educators, experiences of cybervictimization may represent an interpersonal job demand that requires emotional and cognitive effort to manage.

Current Study

Despite growing research on cyberbullying among students, very few studies have examined cyberbullying directed at school personnel worldwide, and in particular in the United States. Existing work has largely focused on student targets and student aggressors, and more recent research has begun to examine

teacher experiences. However, we did not find any studies that included other adult school stakeholders, leaving a gap in our understanding of the prevalence and experiences of cyberbullying against administrators, school psychologists, social workers, counselors, and support staff. Further, little is known about the role of non-student aggressors, including parents, colleagues, and administrators. Addressing this gap is critical, as cyberbullying may have significant implications for educators' well-being and their intentions to transfer schools or leave the profession. The present study aims to extend prior research by investigating cyberbullying directed at school personnel across multiple roles and by multiple aggressor types. Specifically, the study addresses the following research questions: (a) What is the prevalence of cyberbullying against school personnel (i.e., teachers, administrators, support staff, and paraprofessionals), across different aggressors (i.e., students, parents, colleagues, administrators); (b) how is experiencing cyberbullying associated with educators' well-being; and (c) what is the relationship between cyberbullying and educators' intentions to transfer schools or quit their positions? Through this study, we seek to provide a comprehensive and ecologically grounded understanding of cyberbullying and its impact on well-being in educational settings in the United States.

Methods

Participants

Participants were 10,340 school personnel who completed an online survey conducted between March and June, 2023. Respondents represented a wide range of professional roles within pre-K–12 schools, including teachers (63%), administrators (4%), school psychologists, social workers, and counselors (20%), and other school staff, such as paraprofessionals and school security (13%). The sample was predominantly female (82%), with 18% identifying as male and less than 1% identifying with other gender identities. Participants reported an average of 15.0 years of experience in the education sector ($SD = 9.35$). Participants identified as White (77.7%), African American (7.2%), Hispanic (6%), Multiracial (4.7%), Asian (1.3%), Native American or Alaska Native (0.4%), Pacific Islander (0.1%), or another race (1.3%), consistent with national demographics of school personnel (Taie & Goldring Westat, 2020). Participants represented all school levels, including elementary (38.6%), middle school (17.6%), high school (26.5%), and other grade configurations (4.6%), such as Pre-K, K, or 1 through 12 settings. Almost half (45%) worked in suburban schools, 29.6% in urban schools, and 24.4% in rural schools.

Measures

Cyberbullying Victimization

Participant experiences of various types of verbal/threatening, physical and property aggression and violence were assessed across multiple aggressors. The single item assessing cyberbullying was "I experienced cyber/internet bullying." Respondents indicated the frequency of this experience on a 6-point scale (*never* = 0, *once*, *a few times*, *monthly*, *weekly*, or *daily* = 5) during the school year. To identify the source of cyber aggression, participants were also asked to select all applicable aggressor categories: students, parents/guardians, colleagues, and/or administrators. Multiple selections were permitted,

allowing respondents to report cyberbullying by more than one group. To examine prevalence rates, the cyberbullying item was dichotomized to distinguish between educators who had no exposure (“never”) and those who had experienced cyberbullying at least once during the school year (“once” or more) to examine rates across aggressors. In addition, to capture variability in exposure across aggressors, a continuous cyberbullying variable was created by averaging reported frequencies of cyberbullying perpetrated by students, parents/guardians, colleagues, and administrators. This composite measure was used in all regression analyses.

Educator Work Anxiety and Stress

The Educator Work Anxiety and Stress Scale (McMahon, Espelage, et al., 2022) was used to assess school-related stress and anxiety. The scale includes three items evaluating how often educators experienced stress or anxiety related to their job (e.g., “I find my work stressful,” “I have anxiety when thinking about school”). Items were rated on a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from *not at all* (0) to *almost always* (4). Scale scores were computed by averaging responses across the three items, requiring at least two valid responses for a score to be calculated. The scores on the scale demonstrated strong internal consistency ($\alpha = .89$) in the current study, as well as in previous studies (e.g., McMahon, Worrell et al., 2024; McMahon, Swenski et al., 2024).

Psychological Distress

Educators’ psychological distress was assessed using the Kessler Psychological Distress Scale (K6; Kessler et al., 2002). This six-item measure asks respondents how frequently they experienced various forms of mental distress over the past 30 days. Participants rated each item on a 5-point scale ranging from 0 (*none of the time*) to 4 (*all of the time*). Example items include feeling “nervous,” “sad or depressed,” and that “everything was an effort.” In the present study, we calculated the sum of all six items, with higher scores indicating greater psychological distress. K6 scores have demonstrated strong internal reliability ($\alpha = .89\sim.92$) and validity evidence in prior research (Kessler et al., 2002), and internal consistency in our sample was also strong ($\alpha = .90$).

Intentions to Transfer Schools or Leave the Profession

Retention intentions were assessed using the Educator Transfer and Quit Scales (McMahon, Astor, et al., 2022). The measure consists of two 3-item scales. The Transfer scale assesses the desire or plans to move to a different position or school/district (e.g., “I want to transfer to a different position or school/district”). The Quit scale assesses educators’ intentions to quit or retire early (e.g., “I want to quit my profession”). Items were rated on a 5-point agreement scale (*strongly disagree* = 1 to *strongly agree* = 5). Responses within each scale were averaged to create continuous Transfer and Quit scores as long as at least two of the three items in each scale were answered. The Transfer and Quit scales were treated as separate constructs in all analyses. Reliability for scores on these subscales has been established in previous research (e.g., McMahon, Swenski, et al., 2024), and internal consistency was strong for the current study (Transfer $\alpha = .92$, Quit $\alpha = .87$).

Procedure

The American Psychological Association's Task Force on Violence Against Educators and School Personnel led the development and dissemination of the present survey as part of a broader effort to understand educators' experiences with violence and aggression, effects of these experiences, and the roles of school and community context. Data were collected between March and June 2023. To reach a broad cross-section of school personnel working in U.S. pre-K–12 schools, the Task Force distributed surveys via email to educators and school personnel that were stratified by region, role, school level, and urbanicity. These emails were provided by MCH Strategic Data, a national provider of education contact information that compiles educator email addresses from publicly available education data sources. In addition, the Task Force collaborated with national education-sector partners to disseminate the survey. Recruitment occurred through newsletters, organizational listservs, social media platforms (e.g., Facebook, Twitter), and direct email distribution. The survey was framed as a study on school climate and safety, providing school personnel with an opportunity to share their experiences and offer recommendations for improving school safety. Participants were informed that the survey would take approximately 20–25 minutes to complete and were given the option to enter a raffle for one of several \$25–\$100 gift cards upon survey completion. Participation was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained electronically prior to beginning the survey. To assess the quality and authenticity of online responses, we conducted multiple data-screening procedures prior to analysis. Response patterns across multiple variables were examined to identify potentially careless or invalid responding, and multivariate outliers and responses that were illogical or unusually extreme were reviewed and removed when appropriate. Open-ended responses were also examined for duplicated responses and mechanical or otherwise atypical language that could indicate automated (bot) responding. These screening procedures were used to identify and remove potentially invalid or bot-generated responses prior to creation of the analytic sample.

Data Analytic Approach

All analyses were conducted using R (version: 2025.05.0 + 496). To address the study's first research question regarding the prevalence of cyberbullying against school personnel across aggressors and variation in rates across professional roles, cyberbullying victimization was operationalized as a single composite dichotomous indicator representing whether an educator experienced at least one incident of cyber or internet-based bullying during the current school year. In addition, descriptive analyses by aggressor type were conducted within the subset of educators who reported experiencing cyberbullying. Binary indicators representing whether the aggressor was a student, parent/guardian, colleague, or administrator were used, and the proportion of educators reporting victimization by each aggressor type was calculated as the mean of the corresponding binary variable. This allowed us to estimate aggressor-specific prevalence rates among those who experienced cyberbullying while maintaining a consistent analytic sample across role-stratified analyses. Descriptive statistics (means and standard deviations) and intercorrelations among the primary study variables are presented in Table 1.

Table 1
Means, Standard Deviations, and Intercorrelations Among Study Variables

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Cyberbullying experience	0.10	0.37									
2. Years of Experience	15.0	9.35	.01								
3. Anxiety/Stress	2.24	1.06	.10**	-.04**							
4. Psychological Distress	6.92	5.66	.19**	-.08**	.76**						
5. Transfer Intentions	2.19	1.29	.13**	-.09**	.48**	.49**					
6. Quit Intentions	2.47	1.32	.13**	+.07**	.58**	.55**	.53**				
7. Cyberbullying from Students	0.13	0.53	.80**	+.01	.10**	.18**	.13**	.13**			
8. Cyberbullying from Parents	0.14	0.53	.77**	+.03*	.09**	.16**	.09**	.13**	.46**		
9. Cyberbullying from Colleagues	0.06	0.41	.77**	-.01	.03**	.12**	.09**	.07**	.45**	.40**	
10. Cyberbullying from Administrators	0.04	0.32	.69**	-.02	.02	.12**	.09**	.05**	.34**	.33**	.58**
<i>Note.</i> M = Mean; SD = Standard Deviation. Values in brackets are 95% confidence intervals. All means, standard deviations, and correlations were analyzed using the continuous variables.											
* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.											

To examine the association between cyberbullying and educator well-being (i.e., anxiety/stress and psychological distress), linear regression models were conducted, controlling for years of experience, race, gender, school urbanicity, and school level. To assess the relationship between cyberbullying and retention intentions (transfer/quit), separate linear regression models were conducted for transfer intentions and quit intentions, both treated as continuous outcomes. Model assumptions, including linearity, homoscedasticity, multicollinearity, and normality of residuals, were satisfied using diagnostic functions in R.

Results

Prevalence of Cyberbullying across School Personnel and Aggressors

Findings indicate that cyberbullying victimization was prevalent among adult school stakeholders, with 13% of the entire sample reporting at least one experience of cyberbullying. Administrators reported the highest prevalence, with 33% indicating that they had experienced at least one form of cyberbullying during the current school year. Cyberbullying was also reported by 14% of teachers, 9% of school psychologists, social workers, and counselors, and 6% of school staff.

Among the 13% of the sample who reported experiencing cyberbullying, respondents often indicated multiple aggressors. Overall, students (56%) and parents or guardians (59%) emerged as the most commonly reported aggressors, followed by colleagues (22%) and administrators (14%). When aggressor type was examined across educator roles, distinct patterns emerged (see Fig. 1). Teachers reported similar levels of cyberbullying from students (58%) and parents or guardians (55%). Administrators were most frequently targeted by parents, with 78% of victimized administrators reporting parent-initiated aggression. Similarly, school psychologists, social workers, and counselors reported high levels of parent cyberbullying (78%). School staff reported cyberbullying at similar rates from both students (51%) and parents (46%). These patterns suggest that while students constitute a consistent source of cyberbullying across roles, parent cyberbullying is particularly prevalent among administrators and support personnel, indicating role-specific vulnerabilities within school systems.

Relationship between Cyberbullying and Psychological Well-Being

As shown in Table 2, the prevalence of cyberbullying was examined in relation to educator well-being. Cyberbullying predicted higher anxiety ($\beta = 0.11, p < .001$) and psychological distress ($\beta = 0.19, p < .001$). In addition, several demographic covariates were significantly associated with well-being. Participants who were female, White, less experienced, and/or who work in urban schools were more likely to report higher rates of anxiety and distress relative to those who were male, Black, more experienced, and rural. School level was also associated with outcomes, with middle school educators reporting higher anxiety and distress relative to elementary school educators. Overall, these findings indicate that cyberbullying has a substantial and independent negative association with educator well-being, even after accounting for demographic variables and school context.

Table 2
Regression Models Predicting Educator Anxiety, Transfer Intentions, Quit Intentions, and Psychological Distress

Predictor	Anxiety		Psychological Distress		Transfer Intentions		Quit Intentions	
	<i>B</i> (<i>SE</i>)	β	<i>B</i> (<i>SE</i>)	β	<i>B</i> (<i>SE</i>)	β	<i>B</i> (<i>SE</i>)	β
Cyberbullying	.35*** (.04)	.11	3.23*** (.20)	.19	.47*** (.05)	.12	.54*** (.05)	.14
Years of experience	– .01*** (.00)	– .06	– .06*** (.01)	– .09	– .01*** (.00)	– .09	.01*** (.00)	.07
Race/Ethnicity								
African American	– .55*** (.05)	– .14	–2.09*** (.26)	– .09	.05 (.06)	.01	– .30*** (.06)	– .06
Hispanic	– .27*** (.05)	– .06	– .63* (.29)	– .03	– .02 (.07)	– .00	– .03 (.07)	– .00
Multiracial	– .01 (.06)	– .00	.24 (.31)	.01	.05 (.07)	.01	.08 (.07)	.01
Other race	– .33** (.12)	– .03	–1.04 (.63)	– .02	.08 (.15)	.01	– .33* (.15)	– .03
Native American/ Alaska Native	– .58** (.22)	– .03	–1.24 (1.19)	– .01	– .08 (.28)	– .00	– .43 (.28)	– .02
Asian	– .21 (.11)	– .02	– .79 (.59)	– .02	– .03 (.14)	– .00	– .24 (.14)	– .02
Pacific Islander	–1.16** (.36)	– .04	–3.33 (1.93)	– .02	– .94* (.45)	– .02	–1.17* (.46)	– .03
Gender								
Male	– .31*** (.03)	– .12	– .76*** (.17)	– .05	– .06 (.04)	– .02	– .17*** (.04)	– .05
Gender other	.28 (.17)	.02	2.85** (.90)	.04	.12 (.21)	.01	– .04 (.22)	– .00
Urbanicity								
Suburban	.20*** (.03)	.09	.84*** (.17)	.07	.14*** (.04)	.05	.19*** (.04)	.07
Urban	.28*** (.03)	.12	1.27*** (.18)	.10	.35*** (.04)	.12	.20*** (.04)	.07
School level								
Note. SE = standard error; B = unstandardized coefficient; β = standardized coefficient. Reference groups: White, female, rural, and elementary school.								
* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.								

Predictor	Anxiety		Psychological Distress		Transfer Intentions		Quit Intentions	
	<i>B</i> (<i>SE</i>)	β	<i>B</i> (<i>SE</i>)	β	<i>B</i> (<i>SE</i>)	β	<i>B</i> (<i>SE</i>)	β
Middle school	.12*** (.03)	.05	.71*** (.18)	.05	.16*** (.04)	.05	.21*** (.04)	.06
High school	– .06* (.03)	– .03	.12 (.16)	.01	– .03 (.04)	– .01	.00 (.04)	.00
Other grades	– .17** (.06)	– .04	– .76* (.31)	– .03	– .15* (.07)	– .03	– .09 (.07)	– .02
<i>R</i> ²	.067		.070		.040		.040	
<i>Observations</i>	6,928		6,871		6,889		6,896	
<i>Note.</i> SE = standard error; B = unstandardized coefficient; β = standardized coefficient. Reference groups: White, female, rural, and elementary school.								
* p < .05. ** p < .01. *** p < .001.								

Cyberbullying and Educator Transfer and Quit Intentions

Cyberbullying was a significant predictor of both transfer ($\beta = 0.12, p < .001$) and quit intentions ($\beta = 0.14, p < .001$), indicating that educators who experienced more frequent cyberbullying were more likely to consider changing schools or leaving the profession (see Table 2). Several covariates also showed significant associations in the adjusted models. Fewer years of experience, being female, working in urban or suburban contexts (relative to rural), working at the middle school (relative to elementary school) levels were associated with greater transfer or quit intentions. Identifying as a Pacific Islander was a significant predictor of intention to quit. These findings highlight that cyberbullying is related to educators' workforce-related intentions, independent of demographic and school contextual factors.

Discussion

Cyberbullying Prevalence

Cyberbullying of school personnel is a serious public health problem that impacts professional behavior, well-being and retention in schools. Using an ecological framework and the JD-R theory, the current study builds on the previous research focused on students and teachers and explores the prevalence and associations of cyberbullying with an expanded group of school stakeholders, including school administrators, teachers, school psychologists, school social workers, counselors, and other school staff. We found that 13% of the overall national sample of school personnel reported experiencing cyberbullying from at least one aggressor during the school year, similar to prior studies that focused exclusively on teachers. For example, Qiao and Patterson (2021) reported that approximately one out of five teachers had experienced cyberbullying, and Moon, McCluskey, and Saw (2024) found that about 15% of U.S. teachers reported cyberbullying by students or parents. Taken together, the present findings suggest that

cyberbullying is pervasive, not confined to a single role within the school microsystem but occurring across multiple professional positions embedded in the same organizational environment.

With respect to aggressors, parents/guardians (59%) and students (56%) remained the primary sources of cyberbullying; however, this study illustrates that cyberbullying is also perpetrated by colleagues (22%) and administrators (14%), highlighting an often-overlooked dimension of the phenomenon. Notably, school staff and administrators reported relatively higher rates of cyberbullying from colleagues. Although Rajbhandari and Rana (2023) documented instances in which colleagues serve as aggressors of cyberbullying in their qualitative research in Nepal, this is the first quantitative study examining cyberbullying across school stakeholder roles and aggressors. The present findings suggest that cyberbullying is embedded in broader interpersonal dynamics within schools and may be closely linked to staff relationships and organizational culture within the school microsystem. Building on Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory, Astor and Benbenishty (2019)'s model of school violence and climate emphasizes that influences from outside the school, such as family and community contexts, do not directly produce school-based violence but are mediated through internal school processes.

In line with this perspective, the present findings suggest that cyberbullying is shaped not only by external actors or individual interactions but by school organizational culture, leadership, and interpersonal dynamics within the school microsystem and across mesosystem interactions. This suggests that ecological processes within the school microsystem are not confined to spatial boundaries but are socially structured through organizational hierarchies and patterns of authority that persist across online and offline contexts. Evidence from workplace cyberbullying research outside of educational settings further underscores the role of organizational context in shaping cyberbullying behaviors. Prior research suggests that organizational climate and leadership practices play a central role in either exacerbating or mitigating cyberbullying in professional environments. For example, Iftikhar and colleagues (2021), in a survey of service sector employees in Pakistan, found that supportive leadership, clear role definitions, reduced role conflict, and manageable workloads were associated with significantly lower levels of workplace cyberbullying. Similarly, Malik and colleagues (2025) demonstrated that transparent and fair promotion and reward systems, minimized favoritism, and clearly articulated organizational policies were associated with reduced cyberbullying. Together, this body of work reinforces the ecological interpretation that cyberbullying is not solely an interpersonal phenomenon but may be deeply embedded within organizational structures and cultures that define daily interactions in schools.

Another noteworthy finding is the relatively high prevalence of cyberbullying victimization reported by administrators. Given that administrators occupy roles involving disciplinary actions and final decision-making authority, they may be particularly vulnerable to dissatisfaction and conflict from students, parents, and colleagues alike (Rorrer & Skrla, 2005). Ecologically, administrators are positioned at the intersection of the school microsystem and multiple mesosystem processes, engaging simultaneously with students, parents, teachers, and district-level personnel. To date, research on cyberbullying in school contexts has rarely examined administrators as victims. The present results suggest that formal authority and status of administrators may be weakened, such that others feel more comfortable aggressing online versus in person, increasing administrator vulnerability to online targeting. This interpretation is consistent with

theoretical discussions emphasizing the disinhibition effects of online environments and the relative erosion of authority in digital contexts (Suler, 2004).

At the same time, cyberbullying involving school personnel more broadly, including student-to-teacher or student-to-administrator targeting, may be shaped not only by microsystem interactions but also by mesosystem factors. In particular, cyberbullying often occurs outside the physical confines of the school building, where the perceived authority of school personnel may be attenuated. This contextual shift may embolden aggressors by reducing the immediacy of institutional oversight and consequences, even when the relational “bad” actors originate within the school microsystem. Taken together, these findings highlight the need to conceptualize student-school personnel cyberbullying as a phenomenon shaped by the interplay of microsystem relationships and mesosystem contexts, rather than as a purely microsystemic process. As such, administrator-targeted cyberbullying represents an important issue warranting further theoretical and empirical investigation.

Cyberbullying and Educator Well-Being

The present study reveals that cyberbullying against school staff is negatively associated with mental health issues and career-related outcomes (transferring schools or quitting the profession). Specifically, experiences of cyberbullying significantly predicted higher levels of anxiety and stress, greater psychological distress, including depressive and anxiety symptoms, as well as stronger intentions to transfer or leave one’s profession. The association between cyberbullying and turnover intentions is particularly salient in the context of chronic teacher shortages (Ingersoll, 2001; Moon, Saw, & Vasquez, 2024). Persistent online harassment and attacks may erode job satisfaction and perceived professional efficacy, thereby increasing the likelihood that educators consider exiting their positions or the profession altogether.

Our findings are consistent with and build upon prior research (Moon, Saw, & Vasquez, 2024; Qiao & Patterson, 2021; Vogl-Bauer, 2014). Specifically, we found that female teachers, those with fewer years of experience, and White teachers experienced significantly greater negative effects on well-being. Prior research has shown that female teachers and those with fewer years of experience are more likely to experience cyberbullying, and that middle school teachers report higher levels of victimization than high school teachers (Wang et al., 2019; Moon, McCluskey, & Saw, 2024). In addition, cyberbullying perpetrated by parents has been observed more frequently among White teachers compared to Latine/Hispanic teachers (Moon, McCluskey, & Saw, 2024).

Our findings can also be interpreted through the Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) model, which provides a framework for understanding how workplace demands may contribute to employee strain and occupational outcomes. Prior research applying the JD-R model in educational contexts has demonstrated that teachers’ job demands and resources are associated with important outcomes, including teacher well-being and intentions to remain in or leave the profession (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2018). From this perspective, cyberbullying may represent an interpersonal job demand that requires sustained emotional and cognitive effort from educators. Repeated exposure to hostile online interactions may increase psychological strain

and contribute to concerns about remaining in the profession, particularly when educators perceive limited resources to address or cope with these experiences.

Overall, the findings indicate that cyberbullying is not limited to teachers but affects a wide range of school personnel, including administrators and mental health professionals, and that aggressors extend beyond students and parents. Moreover, the associations between cyberbullying, poorer mental health, and heightened turnover intentions underscore the need for comprehensive prevention and intervention strategies that address the school community as a whole. Ecologically informed interventions should therefore target not only individuals but also the relational and organizational conditions within the school microsystem and across school-family mesosystem interactions.

Limitations

This study has several limitations. First, this study is cross-sectional and used only one item to assess cyberbullying. The study design precludes causal interpretation of the variables analyzed. Longitudinal research and development of multi-dimensional assessment tools of cyberbullying are needed. Second, this study does not examine the underlying reasons or processes through which cyberbullying may lead individuals to consider transferring or leaving their positions, nor does it capture the subjective meanings and experiences associated with victimization. Addressing these gaps will require qualitative and mixed-methods research to provide a more nuanced understanding of adult school stakeholder experiences with past and current cyberbullying. Third, although academic definitions of cyberbullying often indicate the harm is repetitive (Hinduja & Patchin, 2014), assessment in this study did not specify that cyberbullying must be repetitive and allowed participants to identify the frequency of these experiences. Specifying and taking into account frequency of cyberbullying (or cyberaggression, which can incorporate more isolated incidents; Grigg, 2010) is a strength of this study. Future research would benefit from measurement and analytic approaches that explicitly differentiate between isolated incidents and repeated cyberbullying experiences.

Practice, Policy, and Research Implications

Practice. The findings of this study suggest the need to expand approaches to addressing cyberbullying in schools from student-centered frameworks to those encompassing the entire school ecology. By using an ecological model and including teachers, administrators, professional staff, and parents as relevant actors, cyberbullying can be understood as a multilevel phenomenon shaped by interactions among individuals, relationships, and organizational contexts. Efforts to foster trust among staff and strengthen constructive relationships with parents may contribute to the prevention of cyberbullying by improving the overall school climate. In this regard, Foley et al. (2015) proposed strategies to prevent parent-perpetrated cyber harassment, including systematically teaching effective parent-teacher communication skills in teacher preparation programs and assigning mentors to novice teachers. These recommendations align with the present findings and underscore the importance of cultivating relational and communication skills that extend beyond the school's internal boundaries.

Second, cyberbullying should be explicitly integrated into existing frameworks for violence prevention in schools. Applying social and emotional learning (SEL) principles to digital communication is critical for promoting awareness of the impact and responsibility associated with online behavior. Giumetti and Kowalski (2022) emphasized the importance of educating entire school communities about the existence of digital trails left by online actions as a means of increasing accountability for cyberbullying. Also, enrolling students and parents/guardians in problem-solving, such as how to prevent and address school cyberbullying are essential to addressing context-specific needs. Such educational efforts may serve as deterrents in online environments where anonymity and invisibility often weaken perceived responsibility.

Third, the observed associations between cyberbullying, mental health, and turnover intentions strongly suggest that responses to cyberbullying should extend beyond individualized, post-incident coping strategies and be institutionalized as part of organizational support systems. Moon, McCluskey and Saw (2024) reported that 69% of teachers who experienced cyberbullying formally reported their victimization, a relatively high reporting rate compared to other studies of teacher victimization. However, qualitative research conducted in South Africa by Bester and colleagues (2017) found that teachers who sought external support, including legal action, were sometimes labeled as “problematic teachers,” potentially resulting in adverse career consequences. Teachers also reported feeling that they received insufficient support from their schools following cyberbullying incidents. Ensuring safe and accessible reporting channels, providing training for administrators and staff, and developing psychological support and peer support systems are essential components of a coordinated organizational response. Such infrastructures can help prevent victimized staff from becoming isolated and enable consistent, school-wide responses to cyberbullying incidents.

Policy. At both the school and educational policy levels, there is a need to establish explicit policies and guidelines that address cyberbullying, and encompass prevention, training, and response procedures. Some states have enacted policies restricting student cell phone use in schools (Roush, 2024); however, the impact of these regulations on student and teacher cyberbullying and well-being remains largely unknown. In addition, many states have laws that include cybervictimization, yet the focus is on students rather than educators —protections are needed for educators. Examining which policies are most effective in particular contexts, as well as implementation fidelity, would be helpful in addressing cyberbullying.

Research. Future research should examine how practices and policies influence the prevalence of cyberbullying as well as educators’ mental health and turnover intentions. In addition, although prior research has documented associations between cyberbullying and educator turnover, the mechanisms through which these experiences influence transfer and quit decisions remain insufficiently understood. Future research should also examine whether job resources, such as administrative support and organizational climate, buffer the association between cybervictimization and educator well-being. Longitudinal research with large-scale population-based samples that take into account school context would be helpful to examine the mechanisms that play a role in fostering as well as reducing cyberbullying across school stakeholders. In addition, qualitative research may facilitate understanding of how educators interpret and make meaning of cyberbullying incidents across professional roles and aggressor types, thereby informing the development of more context-sensitive prevention and support strategies.

Conclusion

The present study offers a comprehensive and ecologically informed analysis of cyberbullying directed at school personnel, thereby extending prior research that primarily focused on teachers and students. By investigating multiple professional roles and diverse aggressor types, this research provides crucial insights into the prevalence and consequences of online aggression within the educational sector. Addressing cyberbullying requires moving beyond student-centered frameworks to adopt comprehensive system-level strategies that include all levels of school staff, including parents/guardians. Future efforts should integrate explicit policies and responses into existing violence prevention frameworks, ensure robust institutional support, and promote positive digital communication skills among all school stakeholders to ensure a safe learning and work environment for all.

Declarations

Author Contribution

SY: Conceptualization, methodology, formal analysis, investigation, data curation, writing—original draft, writing—review and editing, visualization, and project administration. TS, JH, KBV, and RG: Literature review, writing—original draft, and writing—review and editing. SDM: Conceptualization, methodology, supervision, and writing—review and editing. AM, EMA, RAA, DLE, LAR, and FCW: Writing—review and editing. All authors reviewed and approved the final version of the manuscript and agree to be accountable for all aspects of the work.

Data Availability

The data are not available for public access. Study materials are available upon request.

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Figures

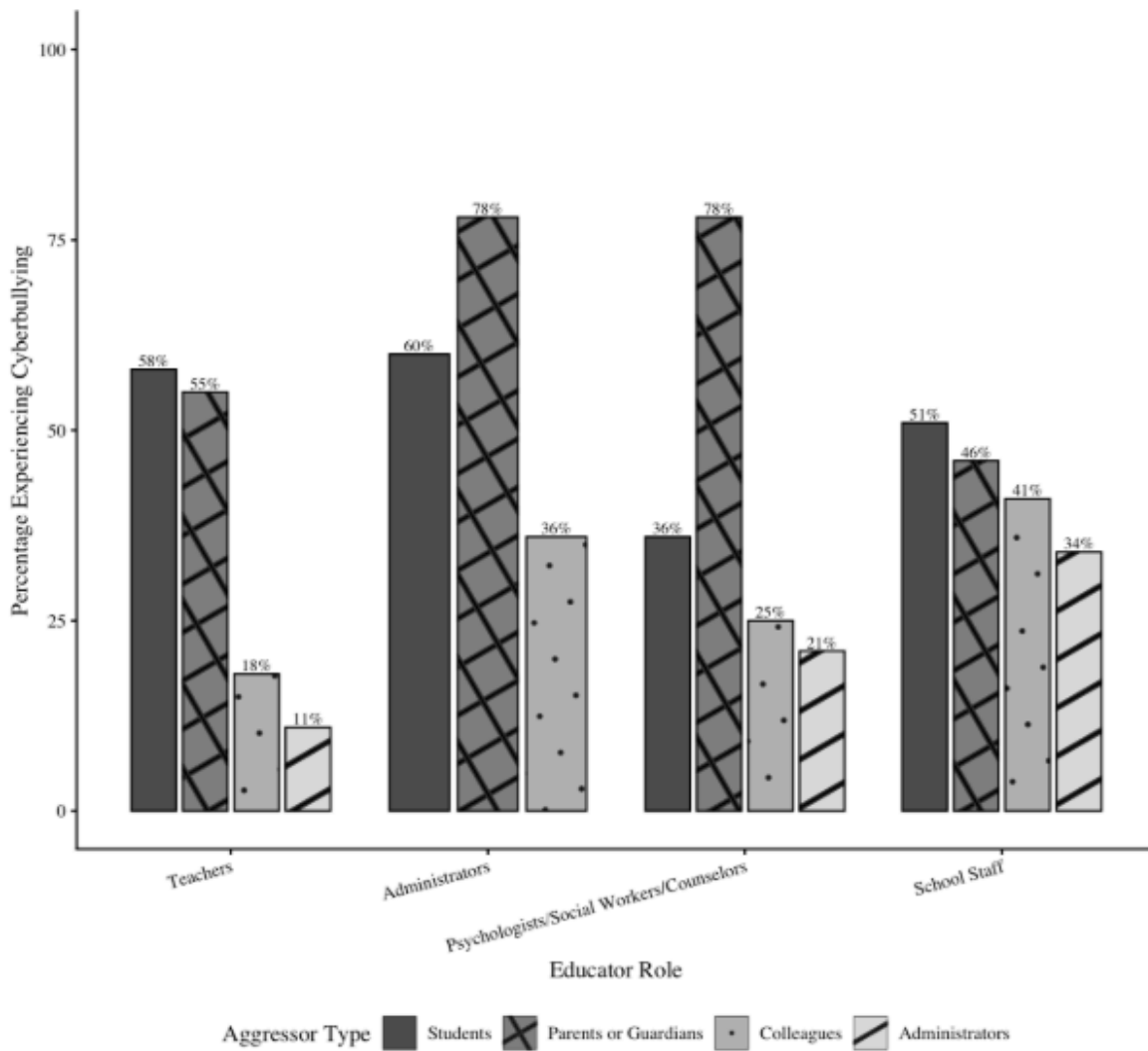


Figure 1
Aggressors of Cyberbullying Reported by Educator Role

Note. Percentages are not mutually exclusive because respondents could select more than one aggressor. Administrators had the option to select from three aggressor types; all other respondents selected from four types.