Journal of English Language and Education
ISSN 2597- 6850 (Online), 2502-4132 (Print)
Journal Homepage: https://jele.or.id/index.php/jele/index

OPEN ACCESS Article

Peer Attachment and Cyberbullying in Junior High School Students Reviewed from Gender and Class Level

https://doi.org/10.31004/jele.v11i1.1898

* Rabiatul Adawiah Al Mustasyar, Novita Maulidya Jalal, Nurfajrianti Rasyid[abc]
[123]Universitas Negeri Makassar, Indonesia
*Corresponding Author: rabiatuladawiahalmustasyar@gmail.com

A B S T R A C T

Cyberbullying has increasingly emerged as a serious issue along with the intensive use of social media among students. This study aimed to examine differences in peer attachment and cyberbullying behavior among junior high school students based on gender and grade level. A quantitative approach was employed, involving 245 students of SMP Negeri 11 Makassar selected through accidental sampling. Data were collected using peer attachment and cyberbullying scales and were analyzed using nonparametric tests, namely Mann–Whitney and Kruskal–Wallis tests. The results show a significant difference in cyberbullying behavior based on gender, with female students displaying higher levels than male students, while peer attachment does not significantly differ by gender. Based on grade level, cyberbullying behavior significantly differs, with eighth-grade students showing the highest tendency, whereas peer attachment is strongest among seventh-grade students. These findings indicate that positive peer relationships play an important role in reducing cyberbullying behavior during adolescence.

Keywords: *Cyberbullying, Gender, Peer Attachment, Students, Grade Level*

Article History:
Received 22nd December 2025
Accepted 20th January 2026
Published 22nd January 2026

INTRODUCTION

The development of information and communication systems has progressed very rapidly and has become an integral part of adolescent life. This advancement provides ease of access to information and communication without space and time limits. Based on a survey by the Indonesian Internet Service Providers Association (APJII), the rate of internet usage in Indonesia continues to increase, from 64.7% in 2018 to 79.5% in 2024. APJII data (2019) also shows that 66.2% of adolescents aged 10–14 years have used the internet, and 80.4% of them are junior high school (SMP) students. The high penetration of the internet in this adolescent age group shows that the digital world has become a new social space for junior high school students in building relationships and self-identity.

However, the increasing use of the internet also carries various risks, one of which is cyberbullying. Wright (2018) stated that the high intensity of internet use in adolescents increases the chances of involvement in cyberbullying behavior, both as perpetrators and victims. Patchin and Hinduja (2006) define cyberbullying as aggressive behavior that is carried out deliberately and repeatedly through digital media with the aim of hurting others socially and emotionally. In the context of education, cyberbullying is a worrying phenomenon, especially among junior high school students, because it occurs in a vulnerable phase of psychosocial development.

Junior high school is an early adolescence period, which is a phase of self-identity that is characterized by high emotional dependence on peers. At this stage, relationships with peers have an important role in shaping adolescents' behaviors, attitudes, and self-control. One of the relevant concepts in explaining this relationship is *peer attachment*, which is the emotional

bond that exists between an individual and a peer characterized by trust, open communication, and emotional support. Attachment theory explains that the quality of attachment with peers can function as a protective factor as well as a risk factor for the emergence of deviant behavior, including cyberbullying.

Previous research in Indonesia has shown that cyberbullying has a significant impact on adolescent behavior. Kesdu and Amalia (2021) found a significant relationship between cyberbullying on social media and students' reactive behavior, both as perpetrators and victims. Students who engage in cyberbullying tend to show increased aggressive behavior and difficulty managing emotions. In addition, the peer environment can have both positive and negative influences. Social pressure in peer groups, such as the desire to gain recognition, group dominance, and low tolerance, often trigger the emergence of cyberbullying behavior (Ruliyatin & Ridhowati, 2021).

Some studies have also shown that demographic characteristics also influence student involvement in cyberbullying. Pandie and Wiesmann (2016) found that gender and age have an effect on the form of bullying behavior, where male students tend to commit direct aggression, while female students are more likely to engage in indirect aggression such as cyberbullying. In addition, the difference in grade levels also shows variations in involvement in cyberbullying due to the need for social acceptance and recognition from peers.

Although a number of studies have discussed cyberbullying among Indonesian adolescents, there is still a research gap, especially related to the role *of peer attachment* as a protective factor against cyberbullying behavior when reviewed based on gender and grade level in junior high school students. Most previous studies have focused more on the prevalence and impact of cyberbullying, while studies that integrate aspects of peer attachment in the context of Indonesian adolescent development are still limited.

Therefore, this research is important to be conducted to understand more deeply the role of *peer attachment* in cyberbullying behavior in junior high school students in Indonesia. The results of this study are expected to make a theoretical contribution to the development of educational psychology studies as well as practical contributions for schools in designing cyberbullying prevention strategies based on strengthening positive relationships between peers.

METHOD

Data collection in this study used two instruments, namely the cyberbullying scale and the peer attachment scale. Filling in the instrument is done through google form. The data collected was 245 students using accidental sampling techniques. The subject criteria in this study are: 1) Junior High School students, 2) Social media users

The cyberbullying scale used in this study is the scale constructed by Kesdu (2020) which is compiled based on the theory of Patchin and Hinduja (2015). It consists of 15 items using a likert scale system with four answer choices, namely, "1" TP (Never), "2" J (Rare), "3" S (Often), "4" SS (Very Often). The peer attachment scale used is a scale adapted from Kesdu (2020) which uses the theory of Armsden and Greenberg (1983) which consists of 19 items using a likert scale system with four answer choices, namely, "1" STS (Very Not Suitable), "2" TS (Not Suitable), "3" S (Suitable), "4" SS (Very Suitable) The data analysis technique in this study uses a non-parametric test with the Mann-Whitney test and the Kruskal-Wallis test.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The subject of this study consists of 245 students, the following is a description of the subject based on gender and grade level:

Table 1. Description of Research Data

Features	Rincian	Quantity	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	99	40,41%
	Women	146	59,59%
Total		245	100%

Classes	VII	132	53,88%
	VIII	43	17,55%
	IX	70	28,57%
Total		245	100%

Based on the table above, it can be seen that the male respondents are 99 people or equal to 40.41% and the female respondents are 146 people or equal to 59.59% with a total of 245 respondents. The respondent data for class VII was 132 people or equal to 53.88%, class VIII was 43 people or equal to 17.55%, and for class IX as many as 70 people or equal to 28.57%.

Table 2. Mann Whitney Test Variables Cyberbullying

Gender	**Mean Rank**	**p-value**
Male	111,78	0,041
Women	130,61	
Remarks	Signifikan	

Based on the mean value, if the level of cyberbullying in women is higher than in men, with a p-value of 0.041 < 0.05, it can be declared significant (Nachar, 2008).

Table 3. Mann Whitney Variable Peer Attachment Test

Gender	**Mean Rank**	**p-value**
Male	125,74	0,618
Women	121,14	
Remarks	Insignificant	

Based on the mean value, it is said that if the level of peer attachment in men is higher than in women, with a p-value of 0.618 > 0.05, it can be declared insignificant. (Nachar, 2008)

Table 4. Kruskal Wallis Test Variable Cyberbullying

Class Levels	**Mean Rank**	**P-Value**
VII	98,02	< 0.001
VIII	161,91	
IX	146,21	

Based on the mean value, it is known that class VIII has the highest level of cyberbullying with a p-value of 0.001 < 0.05, so it can be said that there is a significant difference between the class levels. (Ostertagová et al., 2014)

Table 5. Kruskal Wallis Test Variable Peer Attachment

Class Levels	**Mean Rank**	**P-Value**
VII	135,92	0,002
VIII	92,60	
IX	117,30	

Based on the mean value, it is known that class VII has the highest level of peer attachment with a p-value of 0.002 < 0.05, so it is said that there is a significant difference between the class levels. (Ostertagová et al., 2014)

Discussion

The results of the statistical test found that *the cyberbullying* variable showed a significant difference between male and female students (p = 0.041). The *mean rank* of women (130.61) is higher than that of men (111.78), so it can be concluded that female students are more involved in *cyberbullying* behavior. On the other hand, in *the peer attachment* variable, there was no significant difference (p = 0.618), with the mean rank values of men (125.74) and women (121.14) being almost balanced. This means that attachment to peers is relatively the same in both groups.

The study found that *cyberbullying* behavior involved more female students than boys. This condition shows that aggressiveness is not always manifested in physical form, but can also be in the form of social interaction in cyberspace that is indirect, but still has a psychological impact on the targeted students. According to the theory of relational aggression (Archer, 2004), women tend to express aggression indirectly, for example through gossip, ostracization, or sarcasm. This form of aggression is easier to do on social media which provides a quick, wide space, and minimal risk of direct confrontation.

The *social information processing* theory put forward by explains that the difference in the way men and women process social information affects the choice of strategies in dealing with conflicts. Women often choose an indirect approach, so this behavior is easier to appear

in the form of Crick dan Dodge (1994) *cyberbullying*. The research also supports these findings, noting that adolescent girls are more active in social media than boys, so the chances of engaging in negative interactions in digital spaces are also greater. In other words, the high involvement of women in Barlett dan Coyne (2014) *cyberbullying* is not only influenced by the typical style of aggression, but also the intensity of female students in using online media.

The results of *the peer attachment* study showed that there was no significant difference between male and female students. The *mean rank* value of both is almost the same, so it can be said that the quality of attachment with peers is not much influenced by gender. According to Allen and Miga (2010) *attachment* in adolescence, both boys and girls need attachment with peers to get emotional support, self-validation, and a sense of belonging. This need is universal in adolescence, so it is natural that no significant differences are found.

In ecological *systems theory* Bronfenbrenner (2005) , it is emphasized that the quality of adolescent social relationships is more shaped by environmental context than biological factors. A supportive classroom environment, a positive school culture, and daily interaction patterns will improve the quality *of peer attachment* for both boys and girls. Conversely, if the social environment is unhealthy, then the quality of attachment with peers will decrease in both groups. Thus, external factors such as social climate are more decisive than gender in forming peer attachment.

Overall, the results of this study show that there are different dynamics between *cyberbullying* and *peer attachment* when viewed from gender. In *cyberbullying*, the difference is evident with female students who are more involved due to the tendency to use relational aggression and the intensity of interactions on social media. In contrast, in *peer attachment*, both males and females have relatively similar levels of attachment, confirming that the need to have close relationships with peers is an important part of the development of gender-independent adolescents. These findings emphasize the need for a broader understanding of adolescents' social development by considering the influence of the environment, group dynamics, and the use of technology that are an integral part of their lives.

The Kruskal-Wallis test conducted in this study showed a significant difference in *the cyberbullying behavior of* junior high school students when viewed from the grade level with a p value of < 0.001. The *mean rank* value shows that grade VIII students occupy the highest position with a score of 161.91, followed by grade IX with a score of 146.21, while grade VII is in the lowest position with a score of 98.02. These results show that *cyberbullying* behavior tends to increase in middle adolescence, particularly in grade VIII. This condition can be understood considering that this phase is a period when adolescents are actively seeking identity and social recognition, so it is not uncommon for students to use aggressive methods, including through digital media, to get a position in a group of friends.

The phenomenon of increasing *cyberbullying* in grade VIII can be explained through psychosocial development theory that places adolescents at the stage of Erikson (1960) *identity versus role confusion*. In the adolescent phase, they try to find out who they are by engaging in intense interaction with peers, including in the realm of social media. It also confirms that middle-aged adolescents are more susceptible to peer pressure, so the behavior is often aimed at gaining acceptance. Thus, this condition is in line with the results of research that shows that grade VIII students have a higher tendency to be involved in Santrock (2012) *cyberbullying* than grade VII who are still adapting and grade IX who are relatively more mature in controlling emotions and building social relationships.

On the other hand, the results of the *Kruskal-Wallis* test on the *peer attachment* variable also showed a significant difference between the class levels (p = 0.002). The *mean rank* value illustrates that grade VII students have the highest level of attachment to their peers (135.92), followed by grade IX (117.30), while grade VIII has the lowest score (92.60). These findings show that at the beginning of entering junior high school, grade VII students really need support from their peers as a form of adaptation to the new environment. This is in line with the opinion that attachment to peers is the main source of emotional support for adolescents during the school transition period. Armsden & Greenberg (1987)

The decline *in peer attachment* in grade VIII students can be explained by the view that middle adolescents often begin to explore independence, test the boundaries of social relationships, and sometimes face conflicts with peers. This process makes students' friendships seem more tenuous than in grade VII. However, in grade IX, there was an increase in re-engagement with peers. This can be caused by a more developed emotional maturity and an awareness of the importance of social support in facing academic challenges and preparing to continue to the next level of education. Steinberg (2005)

If these two results are reviewed together, it can be seen that there is a relationship between the two variables. Grade VIII students who showed *the highest cyberbullying* actually had the lowest *peer attachment*. In contrast, grade VII students who had strong attachments to peers showed lower rates of *cyberbullying*. This suggests that positive attachment to peers can serve as a protective factor against the emergence of deviant behavior in cyberspace. Thus, the results of this study found that *peer attachment* has an important role in explaining the level of *cyberbullying* at the grade level. The high *level of cyberbullying* in grade VIII coupled with low levels of *peer attachment* suggests that weak attachment to peers can increase vulnerability to deviant behavior.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the results of the study, there are differences in cyberbullying behavior based on gender, where female students are more dominant in relational aggression on social media. Peer attachment is relatively equal in males and females, but differs by grade level. Grade VIII students showed the highest tendency to cyberbullying, while peer attachment was strongest in grade VII. Positive peer relationships have been shown to reduce the tendency to cyberbullying. Therefore, schools and counselors are expected to strengthen students' social relations programs, while researchers are further advised to examine other psychosocial variables in more depth.

REFERENCES

Allen, J. P., & Miga, E. M. (2010). Attachment in adolescence: A move to the level of emotion regulation. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, *27*(2), 181–190. https://doi.org/10.1177/0265407509360898

Armsden, G. C., & Greenberg, M. T. (1987). The Inventory of Parent and Peer Attachment: Individual Differences and Their Relationship to Psychological Well-Being in Adolescence. In *Journal of Youth and Adolescence* (Issue 5).

Barlett, C., & Coyne, S. M. (2014). A meta-analysis of sex differences in cyber-bullying behavior: The moderating role of age. *Aggressive Behavior*, *40*(5), 474–488. https://doi.org/10.1002/ab.21555

Crick, N. R., & Dodge, K. A. (1994). A Review and Reformulation of Social Information-Processing Mechanisms in Children's Social Adjustment. In *Psychological Bulletin* (Vol. 115, Issue 1).

Erikson, E. H. (1960). *Identity Youth and Crisis*.

Kesdu, I. A. P., & Amalia, I. (2021). Perilaku cyberbullying: Peran moral disengagement dan peer attachment pada siswa Sekolah Menengah Pertama (SMP). *Jurnal Ecopsy*, *8*(2), 129. https://doi.org/10.20527/ecopsy.2021.09.012

Marleni Pandie, M., Th Weismann, I. J., Magister Pendidikan Agama Kristen Sekolah Tinggi Theologia Jaffray, A., & Doktor Teologi Sekolah Tinggi Theologia Jaffray, D. (2016). Pengaruh Cyberbullying di Media Sosial terhadap Perilaku Reaktif sebagai Pelaku Sebagai Korban Cyberbullying pada Siswa Kristen SMP Nasional Makassar. In *Jurnal Jaffray* (Vol. 14, Issue 1). http://www.hidayatullah.com/iptekes/saintek/read/2012/02/20/56844/banyak-

Nachar, N. (2008). The Mann-Whitney U: A Test for Assessing Whether Two Independent Samples Come from the Same Distribution. In *Tutorials in Quantitative Methods for Psychology* (Vol. 4, Issue 1).

Ostertagová, E., Ostertag, O., & Kováč, J. (2014). Methodology and application of the Kruskal-Wallis test. *Applied Mechanics and Materials*, *611*, 115–120. https://doi.org/10.4028/www.scientific.net/AMM.611.115

Patchin, J. W., & Hinduja, S. (2006). Bullies Move Beyond the Schoolyard: A Preliminary Look at Cyberbullying. *Youth Violence and Juvenile Justice*, *4*(2), 148–169. https://doi.org/10.1177/1541204006286288

Ruliyatin, E., Psi, S., Ridhowati, D., & Pd, S. (2021). *Dampak Cyberbullying pada Pribadi Siswa dan Penanganannya di Era Pandemi Covid-19*. https://journal.unesa.ac.id/index.php/jbk/article/view/10921

Santrock, J. (2012). *Life-Span Development: 14th Edition*. McGraw-Hill Higher Education. https://books.google.co.id/books?id=_Uc0AAAAQBAJ

Steinberg, L. (2005). *Adolescence* (Twelth Edition). McGraw-Hill Education.

Urie BronfenbrenneR (2005). (n.d.).

Wright, M. (2018). Cyberbullying Victimization through Social Networking Sites and Adjustment Difficulties: The Role of Parental Mediation. *Journal of the Association for Information Systems*, *19*, 113–123. https://doi.org/10.17705/1jais.00486