



**Faculty of Cognitive Sciences and Human Development**

**MEDIATING EFFECT OF SELF-ESTEEM ON THE RELATIONSHIP  
BETWEEN LONELINESS AND CYBERBULLYING AMONG  
UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS**

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**Bachelor of Science with Honours  
(Cognitive Science)  
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Final Year Project Report

Masters

PhD

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**MEDIATING EFFECT OF SELF-ESTEEM ON THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN  
LONELINESS AND CYBERBULLYING AMONG UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS**

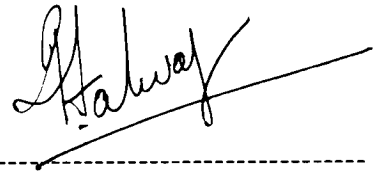
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## **ABSTRACT**

The aim of this study was to investigate the mediating effect of self-esteem on the relationship between loneliness and cyberbullying among undergraduate students in Kota Samarahan. The relationship between loneliness and cyberbullying and the mediating effect of self-esteem towards loneliness and cyberbullying were also explained. The data was collected from 106 undergraduate students at a faculty in a university in Kota Samarahan. Simple random sampling technique was used to select the sample. PROCESS method is used to determine the mediating effect of self-esteem on the relationship between loneliness and cyberbullying while the significant relationship between loneliness and cyberbullying, the significant relationship between loneliness and self-esteem, and the significant relationship between self-esteem and cyberbullying are also identified through the PROCESS. The loneliness shows it has significant relationship to cyberbullying, there is significant relationship between loneliness and self-esteem and there is significant relationship between self-esteem and cyberbullying. Identifying the self-esteem mediates the relationship between loneliness and cyberbullying will help to find out more findings in the research.

## **ABSTRAK**

Tujuan kajian ini adalah untuk mengkaji kesan pengantara harga diri pada hubungan antara kesepian dan pembuli siber dalam kalangan pelajar ijazah di Kota Samarahan. Hubungan antara kesepian dan pembuli siber dan kesan pengantara harga diri ke arah kesepian dan pembuli siber juga telah dijelaskan. Pengumpulan data telah dibuat kepada 106 pelajar ijazah di fakulti dalam sebuah universiti di Kota Samarahan. Teknik persampelan rawak mudah telah digunakan untuk memilih sampel. Cara "PROCESS" telah digunakan untuk menentukan kesan pengantara harga diri pada hubungan antara kesepian dan pembuli siber manakala hubungan yang signifikan di antara kesepian dan pembuli siber, hubungan yang signifikan di antara kesepian dan harga diri, dan hubungan yang signifikan antara harga diri dan pembuli siber juga dikenal pasti melalui proses tersebut. Keputusan menunjukkan kesepian mempunyai hubungan yang signifikan terhadap pembuli siber, terdapat juga hubungan yang signifikan di antara kesepian dan harga diri, dan terdapat hubungan yang signifikan antara harga diri dan pembuli siber. Mengenal pasti harga diri menjadi pengantara hubungan antara kesepian dan pembuli siber akan membantu dalam mengetahui penemuan yang lebih lanjut dalam penyelidikan.

## **CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1 Introduction**

Self-esteem refers to how a person think, worth, perceive and sense about themselves (Cherry, 2019). It involves diversity of trusts about us such as the judgment of our own appearance, faiths, feelings and behaviours. One's self-esteem in adulthood is affected by events in one's teenage years. People with healthy self-esteem love themselves and value their achievements while people who lack of confidence and low self-esteem feel sad or unsatisfied with themselves most of the time.

Self-esteem built up slowly over the time since babyhood. It can begin when a baby or kid gets loving care, feels loved, accepted and safe. A toddler and young children able to do simple things they want by themselves without help from others. They feel motivated and enjoyable about themselves when they can apply their new ability to do something well. Thus, self-esteem develops when parents pass on the sense of proud to them, pay more attention, smiles with them and let the them have a try on everything. Self-esteem also start to grow when a child tries on something, learn things and do things such as make friends with people surrounding, learn things at school, make progress to achieve goals and get prize and praise that they know they should earned (Lyness, 2018).

Parents play an important role in building a child self-esteem. At every growing age, a child learns to do things and parents should help the children in wise. As a child learn to dress, read, ride and speak are the chances for self-esteem to grow. Parents have to show and help children at first when teaching them, then let them do what they can do. It does not matter even if they make mistakes. Parents also should encourage the children with praise them to show the proud of them but do it in a right way, do not overpraise and always be a good role model to them. These are the acts that build self-esteem and good feelings to children.

A person with low self-esteem have a fragile sense of self that hurt easily by others (Firestone, 2019). The characteristics of having low level of self-esteem are uses negatives words to describe themselves such fat, ugly and stupid, ignores their positive potentials, does not believe a person who good wishes them and blames themselves when things go wrong instead of taking account other things. The quality of a person's life reduced due to low self-esteem which includes have negative feelings, afraid of trying to face challenges because they may doubt their abilities, increase of self-harm behaviours such as drug abuse, suicide and eating disorder and less enjoyable social interactions. According to Perren et al. (2010), adolescent victims of bullying and cyberbullying were found to be lower self-esteem.

Loneliness can be described as a sense of feeling lonely, sad and isolated. Loneliness has been increased over the past few decades. According to many experts, if you feel unaccompanied and isolated, that is how the loneliness plays into the mind state and it is not necessarily about being alone. According to BBC Loneliness survey, 40% of 16 to 24 years old young people said that they often or very often feel alone, we can see that it is a very high level of loneliness among this group of people. They are feeling rejected and unwanted by the world. All types and ages of people are affected by feelings of loneliness and isolation, more likely will be impacted to adolescents and elder people (Walton, 2018). A study done by Christos (2015) stated that college students and elderly are those the people at risk for loneliness, experienced disconnected with others and isolated.

There are some reasons that contribute to loneliness such as living situation, social anxiety, fear of rejection and experienced broken relationship in their life. Today, most of the families are divided and live far from each other, it becomes difficult to find ways to connect with others and this kind of living foster isolation. Due to the reasons of childhood being experienced bullied, child abused and neglected, many people are fear of rejection which can show up as social anxiety. Sometimes when break up in a romantic relationship, the feelings

of missing that special people in the life also can be part of loneliness. This is because the person who suddenly leave this world and which are frequently close to us and were still in love, there is a feeling of intense loneliness. According to Coşan (2014), loneliness can be caused by personal characteristics that low self-confidence and introversion has bring people to incompetent with social skills, this may become estranged from others and close relationship with people is unable to maintain.

The feelings of chronic loneliness have negatively effects on both physical and mental health like antisocial behaviour, poor decision making, increased stress levels, decrease memory and learning and others. Loneliness also associated with increased risk of depression. Based on a study of an evaluation of loneliness by Coşan (2014) stated the depressed lonely people feel sad and displeased in every aspects of their lives, even have some people feel anger because of being rejected and unwelcome by others. Additionally, people who suffered loneliness may react to risky and criminal behaviours, drinking alcohol, using drugs and suicide attempts.

The potentially harmful physiological effects of loneliness and social isolation on health connected to problematic changes in the cardiovascular, hormone and immune system. Loneliness impaired health by increasing levels of stress hormones which in turn can cause to heart disease, Type 2 diabetes, dementia, arthritis and even suicide ideation (Brody, 2017). The social isolation results in lack of chances to engage in social and being separated from others. An isolated person may have low level of self-esteem. People who considered as social isolation are avoid from interacting with social due to shyness or depression and they spend prolonged of time alone.

Cyberbullying is the use of electronic device to bully a person by sending messages or post hurtful comments online about that person (Smith et al., 2008). Some examples of



cyberbullying are making fun of certain person on digital media, threatening people using short message service (SMS), WhatsApp, Instagram or any other messenger service (Kumar, 2016). Cyberbullying allows to reach the messages or spreading of rumour to a large audience and offensive anonymously.

Based on National Human Rights Society stated that Cyber Security Malaysia's statistics reported that there are 338 cases of cyberbullying among students in 2017 which is increased compared to cases happened in 2014 (Ignatius, 2018). There are 84 percent of children in Malaysia estimated been bullied while 33 percent had been bullied through online. The New Straits Times in 2017 reported Tan Sri Lee Lam Thye, senior vice-chairman of Malaysian Crime Prevention Foundation said that social media induced to physical bullying and cyberbullying among young adults (Vijaindren, 2017). Moreover, according to a research by tech compare on cyberbullying facts and statistics showed that 23 per cent of parents in Malaysia reported their children has been a victim of cyberbullying. The survey also shows Malaysia is on the sixth place in global cyberbullying ladder, which is ranked in the second worst, better than India (37 percent) out of the 28 countries surveyed.

Advances in technology and better internet access enabled more Malaysians, especially students to explore the virtual world. Digital devices like smartphone, computer and tablets continue to be the most popular technology utilized by students in universities. A greater proportion of students are now using Instagram, Facebook, WeChat and Twitter to have fun and entertainment. The prevalence of social media and digital forums, comments, posts, photos and shared of contents by individuals had exposed them into the problem of cyberbullying which is a behaviour of bullying and harassment using electronic devices. A lot of cyberbullying occurs when children unaware of sending messages which they see as "joking" or "just a trick" is a type of bullying and unaware of the harm they caused can hurt someone (Woda, 2014). A survey conducted by Cyberbullying Research Center stated that the middle

school students and high school students that had been cyberbullied has 34 percent (McCullum, 2019). The posting of harmful comments and spreading of rumours online was the most common cyberbullying behaviour reported in the survey.

The motivations of cyberbullying are come from normal feelings like boredom. The easy access to Internet and opportunity lead students to involve in bullying others online. The research reported that some of the students who cyberbully said they do not feel guilty or shame after cyberbullied others and online bullying make them feel better. According to Zsa et al. (2017) cyberbullying is increasing caused by the lack of knowledge and awareness of this unhealthy activity. Cyberbullying can have serious effects on a child's wellbeing. Children who received foul messages suffer drops in academic performance and possess low self-esteem. Apart from that, cyberbullying increased the suicide thought because the victims may feel hopeless and the only way to escape the pain is through suicide. Hence, parents should always communicate with children, do not dismiss their feelings and take steps to prevent the incident happen on them.

A study conducted by Şahin (2012) stated that loneliness has correlation with cyberbullying and it is an important factor towards cyberbullying. A study on cyberbullying and self-esteem by Patchin and Hinduja (2010) explained that both offenders and victims who experienced cyberbullying was connected to lower levels of self-esteem.

## **1.2 Background of Study**

The study will focus on students who study in campus Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (UNIMAS) which is located at Borneo, Kota Samarahan, Kuching, Sarawak. The campus is 40-minutes' drive from the city of Kuching, the well-known city in the state of Sarawak in Malaysia. The university has a total of 9 Faculties, 9 Research Centres, 5 Research Institutes with a total of 42 Undergraduate and 40 Postgraduate Programmes offered.

Self-esteem is defined as how we sense about ourselves and the worth that we position ourselves. Built and change of self-esteem as a result of different life experiences, the lesson that we learn practice for social interaction and the world. The families love support and acceptance can form a solid foundation for our self-esteem. When a person feeling their expectations are not meet with other's expectations, receiving no praise and bullying can contribute to negative beliefs about yourself. Experiences during childhood plays an important role in building our basic self-esteem (Saadat et al., 2012). Individuals who have scores low self-esteem have more trouble when facing problems and obstacles. A student's self-esteem has a significant impact on almost everything she does, included participated in activities, cope with challenges and interact with other people. Low self-esteem in students can lessen their desire to learn, ability to focus and willingness to take risks.

Adolescents are considered as the highest risk groups feeling loneliness. The absence and displeasure of social interaction results in loneliness (Hu et al., 2013). Loneliness is a serious issue in students (Vaarala et al., 2013). A person who feel frustrated and lonely is also suffering from low self-esteem. According to Ishaq et al. (2017), loneliness is more discovered and critical issues among university students. Experience of feeling lonely and low self-esteem are interconnected problems among adolescence (Vanhalst et al., 2013).

The health problem that caused by the extensive use of information technologies in the society is the feeling of loneliness experienced by the young adult population. The present studies reported that loneliness is associated with low self-esteem. People who felt lonely have greater difficulty in generating solutions to their interpersonal problems, lack of interpersonal successes to own abilities and deficiency traits, thereby might negatively influence self-esteem. A study on self-esteem and loneliness among university students done by Ishaq et al. (2017) supported that self-esteem has significant relationship with loneliness.

In recent years, cyberbullying has ascended with the increased occurrence of digital technology (Brewer & Kerlake, 2015). Internet as the online technology, has been the most popular communication tool among university students all over the world. According to Patchin and Hinduja (2010), in experience with cyberbullying, both as a victim and as an offender, it is related with lower levels of self-esteem. Based on a study done by Cesur (2016a) stated that students who were cyber bullied expressed more loneliness. The individuals can commit cyberbullying and do not feel lonely if they commit cyberbullying and they also commit cyberbullying as they exposed to cyberbullying. Cyberbullying, on the harmful activities, due to its extensive and negative effects is becoming widespread major public problem.

This study is aimed at investigating the mediating effect of self-esteem on the relationship between loneliness and cyberbullying. This study was conducted among undergraduate students in a public university Malaysia. The loneliness is measured through the level of loneliness in respondents, cyberbullying is determined with the actions of respondents in the last 30 days and self-esteem of respondents is examined through the general feelings of respondents themselves.

### **1.3 Problem Statement**

There are several studies and researches stated the relationship of students who experienced loneliness have lower self-esteem and relationship between self-esteem and cyberbullying among university students. Most of previous study that related to this current research is done among university students in non-Asian countries compare in Malaysia.

For the empirical gap, a study done by Brewer and Kerlake (2015) which conducted in England showed the results of that loneliness and cyberbullying perpetration does not have significant relationship but there is significant relationship between self-esteem and cyberbullying when self-esteem lessening, the participation in cyberbullying growths. Another study done by Turan et al. (2011) in Turkey on the university students exposed to cyberbullying were affected by state of loneliness. The findings show strong relationship correlated between loneliness and cyberbullying which determined that the students who frequently accessed the Internet are more frequent to exposed to cyberbullying and the more their loneliness. Hence, this study seek to bridge the gap by conducting the research in selected university in Malaysia which is in Sarawak in finding more evidence on the self-esteem mediates on the relationship between loneliness and cyberbullying.

According to study done by Cesur (2016a), the feeling of loneliness among young adult population caused to extensive use of information and communication technologies, it is evaluated that university students exposed to cyberbullying and their loneliness status is determined to be high. Based on a study done by Brack and Caltabiano (2014) shows that cyberbullies found to be possessed low level of self-esteem and places an individual at a risk of hopelessness, depression and anxiety. A study done by Patchin and Hinduja (2010) reported that adolescence who experienced cyberbullying, both as victims and as offender have lower

self-esteem, higher rates of anxiety and depression (Kowalski & Limber, 2013), suicidal ideation (Extremera et al., 2018) and increased school problems (Hinduja & Patchin, 2008).

#### **1.4 General Objective**

The purpose of this study is to determine the mediating effect of self-esteem on the relationship between loneliness and cyberbullying among undergraduate students in Kota Samarahan.

##### **1.4.1 Specific Objectives**

1. To study if there is any significant relationship between loneliness and cyberbullying.
2. To determine if there is any significant relationship between loneliness and self-esteem.
3. To examine if there is any significant relationship between self-esteem and cyberbullying.
4. To study the mediating effect of self-esteem on the relationship between loneliness and cyberbullying.

## 1.5 Research Hypothesis

### 1.5.1 Null Hypothesis

H<sub>01</sub>: There is no significant relationship between loneliness and cyberbullying.

H<sub>02</sub>: There is no significant relationship between loneliness and self-esteem.

H<sub>03</sub>: There is no significant relationship between self-esteem and cyberbullying.

H<sub>04</sub>: There is no mediation effect of self-esteem on the relationship between loneliness and cyberbullying.

## 1.6 Conceptual Framework

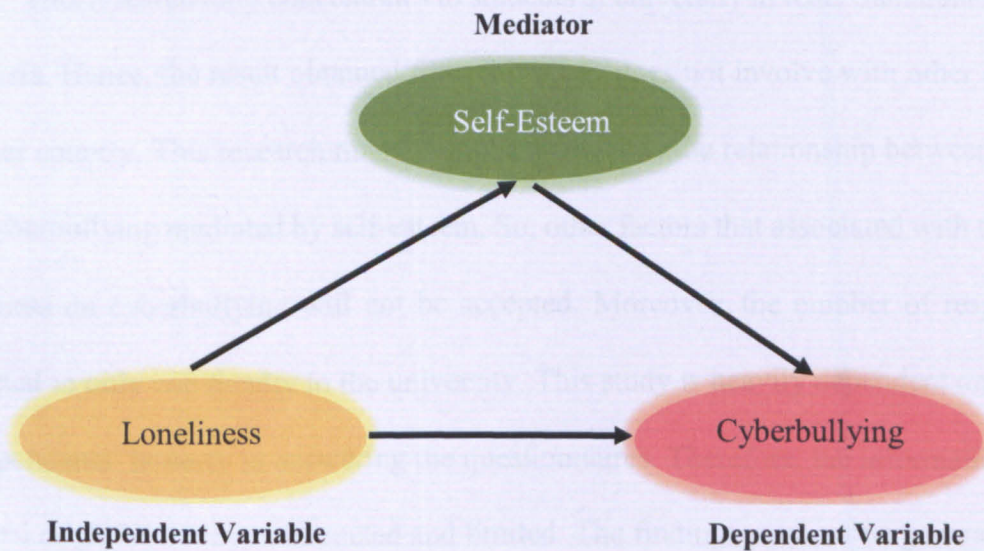


Figure 1 Conceptual Framework

### **1.7 Significance of Study**

This study was to investigate the mediating effect of self-esteem on the relationship between loneliness and cyberbullying. This study is knowledgeable and can be used by academicians as more information regarding loneliness and cyberbullying can be added in the literature part, providing proper suggestion and intervention, and fill in the gaps of knowledge. Besides, knowledge and information provided can give awareness, clear and wide range overviews towards government, educators, clinical workers, parents and society with the current occurrence issue of loneliness and cyberbullying. Additionally, the findings of this study may help to prevent cyberbullying.

### **1.8 Limitations of Study**

This research only concentrates to students at university in Kota Samarahan, Sarawak, Malaysia. Hence, the result obtained from this study does not involve with other universities or other country. This research mainly emphasis towards the relationship between loneliness and cyberbullying mediated by self-esteem. So, other factors that associated with the effect of loneliness on cyberbullying will not be accepted. Moreover, the number of respondents is restricted to only one faculty in the university. This study is heavily dependent on the results of respondents' honesty in answering the questionnaires. Therefore, the information and data received might be overly constructed and limited. The findings may not be generalized.