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KEYWORDS	ABSTRACT
Cyberbullying, Female Journalists, Pakistan, Peshawar, Digital Violence, Spiral of Silence, Forms of Cyberbullying, Coping Mechanism	This research article explores how cyberbullying is acting as an obstacle to female journalists living in a patriarchal society where journalism is considered a male job. The research has examined the forms and consequences of cyberbullying and how female journalists in Peshawar are coping with such bullying. The high rate of growth of digital media has offered more opportunities to reach a mass audience easily; it has also exposed female journalists to a wider variety of online abuse, including trolling, sexual harassment, threats, doxing, impersonation, and character assassination. The study used a quantitative research design, sampling 30 female journalists working in Peshawar through snowball sampling. Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) was used to analyze the collected data through descriptive statistical methods such as frequencies and percentages. The results indicate that cyberbullying is a long-term issue experienced by female journalists and has serious psychological, professional, and social implications, such as stress, anxiety, lack of confidence, self-censorship, and fear for physical safety. The research also shows that female journalists are more inclined to use emotion-centered coping strategies like blocking abusive users, self-care, and restricting exposure to social media, whereas institutional reporting mechanisms did not experience high usage. The study provides a conclusion based on Spiral of Silence Theory, Feminist Media Theory, and Coping Theory that cyberbullying is a gendered silencing practice that deprives women of freedom of expression and reinforces structural inequalities within journalism in Pakistan.
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Introduction

Technology is introducing a new form of connectedness and communication but its miss use has created different problems , one of them is a violence in form of harassment. Journalists and other activists worldwide express and present their opinions on digital platforms where they face harassment (Munir, 2025). Moreover, journalists are moving to new media and abandoning traditional media in their work, using different online media platforms. The problem of cyber bullying or online harassment is very serious and impacts individual's offline. Although harassment in journalism is not a new phenomenon, but predominantly online harassment is becoming more intense every day. Cyberbullying is an international threat to the freedom of the press, especially among female journalists (Baloğlu, 2025). Cyberbullying also influences the professional lives of female journalists since it makes them stop covering certain issues on social media, endure interruptions in the working process, take additional safety measures, and others even consider quitting their jobs(Iqbal et al, 2024).In Pakistan, rape against female journalists and cases of the girl child being sexually harassed have been on the rise in the past decade (Jamil, S.). 2020).

Background of the study

Cyberbullying or online harassment is a term used to describe verbal or nonverbal acts, conduct, and behaviors that are carried out online that violate the dignity of someone and create a hostile, aggressive, demeaning and offensive environment. Depending on the perpetrator's interests, attacks and abuse on online media might be motivated by political, social, economic, racial, religious, or recreational reasons (ONUCHE, 2021).Online harassment or cyberbullying is a broad term that describes a wide variety of abusive actions made possible by technology, such as doxing (the hostile publicity of personally identifying information, such as an address or phone number), flaming (the use of inflammatory language or personal insults), and impersonation (the nonconsensual use of a name or likeness that belongs to another person or entity (Rubin et al., 2020). The terms that are used to refer to this phenomenon are cyberbullying, electronic violence, or online harassment. Cyberbullying has several definitions, with most of them being variations of accepted definitions of traditional bullying. Cyber bullying is usually defined as an aggressive, intentional act or behavior that is perpetrated over time by a group of people or by an individual using electronic means of contact against a victim who is unable to defend himself/herself. Moreno (2014).

Cyberbullying is the largest challenge faced by women journalists around the globe who use online media platforms, especially social networking sites (Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter, Instagram, etc.).Female journalists have numerous hurdles in executing their professional obligations. It is abundantly clear that female journalists are more vulnerable to digital harassment. A recent assessment of 70 million comments submitted on the Guardian website between 2006 and 2016 discovered that eight out of ten of the most abused journalists were women (Tofalvy, 2017). Nowadays, most contacts are made online, which can lead to harmful behaviors. A striking example of such harmful or destructive behaviors is cyberbullying (M. Abaido, 2019).A survey released by the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ, 2018) shows that almost two-thirds of female journalists have been victims of online abuse, and when they reported the abuse, it was most likely

reported to their media management (40%). Most of the abused respondents reported that the attacks had psychological consequences, such as stress and anxiety (63%), 38% acknowledged to self-censorship and 8% lost their jobs.

However, to fight against the abuse, the journalists have developed a list of techniques, including limiting what they post on their social media accounts, editing the stories they report on, and using technological tools to prevent the objectionable content to be posted on their public social media accounts (Chen et al., 2020). Stahel and Schoen (2019) have found that most female journalists do not read negative comments. They also curtail audience involvement, change their approach to reporting, and think of quitting journalism. Women in all walks of life in Pakistan are affected by online misogyny, but given that their jobs require them to be online, female journalists and media personalities are subjected to daily harassment (Jamil, 2020). According to a research published by the Digital Rights Foundation (DRF) (Jahangir, 2019), Facebook and WhatsApp have the poorest records of online harassment and misuse of data. The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) province in the northwest of Pakistan is considered to be one of the most unsafe regions for journalists due to escalating threats and attacks on journalists, cyberbullying has fueled the hurdles for female journalists, despite a surge in online harassment among journalists (Shah et al., 2024). The effects of cyberbullying on Female Journalists and tactics used to combat it by female journalists residing in Peshawar, the capital of Pakistan's Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, are being investigated in this study.

Problem Statement

A crucial component of modern journalism is the effective use of online media platforms. It enabling journalists to discover news sources, distribute content, and engage with audiences. While online abuse or cyberbullying is a major barrier or challenge for journalists using digital media platforms, it becomes more intensive in case of female journalists working in patriarchal societies. Female journalists are particularly affected by cyberbullying. It is essential to thoroughly examine the particular effects of cyberbullying on female journalists and assess the coping mechanisms they use to address these online threats.

Research Questions

1. What are the predominant forms and manifestations of cyberbullying experienced by female journalists in Peshawar, Pakistan?
2. What are the impacts of cyberbullying on female journalists of Pakistan?
3. How do the female journalists tackle such cyberbullying?

Research Objectives

1. To explore the predominant forms and manifestations of cyberbullying experienced by female journalists in Peshawar, Pakistan.
2. To find out the impact of cyberbullying on female journalists

3. To investigate how the female journalists tackle such cyberbullying

Significance of the Study

This research is significant because it addresses an underexplored dimension of digital violence against women in Pakistan's journalism sector. It highlights how cyberbullying threatens press freedom, women's participation in public discourse, and gender equality in media institutions. The findings can guide policymakers, media organizations, and civil society actors in developing strategies to create safer digital environments for female journalists.

Literature Review

Digital technologies and the Internet have greatly benefited journalism. But they also created new avenues for attacking journalists without facing consequences, particularly female journalists facing Online bullying, which has damaged their reputation and reduced women's engagement in public life (Simões et al., 2021). Worldwide, harassment and discrimination against female journalists occur both in public and at work. The participation of female journalists is seriously threatened by personal attacks through social media posts, threatening emails, and online comments, in addition to the obstacles already in place. (Koirala, February 25, 2020). In the past, harassers had to make an effort to find and get in touch with journalists as well as to meet like-minded people who shared their vile views. Rather, everything is made easier by the Internet.

Additionally, through a variety of platforms, hateful viewpoints are discussed, endorsed, and propagated. (Weisbard, 2020). More than 2.5 million Facebook and Twitter posts aimed at two well-known female journalists are examined in-depth in case studies. The first is Maria Ressa, the head of the Philippine news organization Rappler, who was given the annual press freedom prize by UNESCO. She has been the subject of online hate campaigns and the country's judiciary as a result of her reporting; at one time, the investigation revealed, she was getting 90 hate messages every hour on Facebook. (Harrison & Graham, 2021). In the internet age, harassment is a rising issue that endangers the safety of public figures, including journalists, and eventually restricts the right to free speech. It has significant ramifications for the public domain in a democracy based on openness and confidence. Female journalists are more vulnerable to cyberbullying because of their gender (Winqvist & Nina, 2020).

Moreover, digital harassment is widespread and detrimental to female journalists' lives and careers. A large portion of it stems from Gamergate, the online cultural war that started in 2013 and saw hordes of misogynistic trolls target female journalists and gamers. Caitlin Dewey of the Washington Post described it as "a proxy war for a greater cultural battle over space and visibility and inclusion, a battle over who belongs to the mainstream." (Sullivan, 2021). Threats or content that is sexually explicit and violent, as well as gendered insults, criticisms, and objectification of physical bodies, are examples of harassment that targets women. According to studies, women are increasingly subjected to misogynistic harassment, which frequently restricts their ability to express themselves and move around both online and offline (Vickery & Tracy, 2018).

However, one of the most challenging things for journalists who encounter internet harassment is that the offenders are frequently unknown, which provides them with an extra degree of security. The Canadian journalist clarified that anonymous online commenters are the main source of the threats and insults. I've received numerous threats of attack, including one that said they would "human flesh hunt" me. I've been called every derogatory term imaginable (cunt, bitch, hag, slut, prude, moron, etc.), and my education, intelligence, and integrity have all been constantly called into doubt. Some have tried to mimic me so that it sounds like I speak terrible things (Storm & Barton, 2014).

Nature of Cyber Bullying toward Female Journalists

Online attacks often make reference to one's physical attributes, family, or personal connections. Many of the threats that female journalists get on Facebook, Twitter, and online backchannels are sexist in character and are intended to embarrass or intimidate them. The remarks question women's professional qualifications and intellectual rigour (D. Ferrier & Troll Busters, 2018). The report, *Hostile Bytes: A Study of Online Violence against Women Journalists*, emphasizes how, in contrast to their male counterparts, women journalists are frequently the targets of sexualized and personalized abuse on social media platforms, even for simply questioning or criticizing particular narratives or policies. In order to avoid online harassment, 77% of female journalists turned to self-censorship, which had an impact on their personal and professional lives, according to the survey. Furthermore, half of these female journalists received inadequate answers when they reported online harassment to law enforcement (Dawn, 2019).

In addition, one of the hardest things for journalists who are harassed online is that they have an extra layer of safety because the harassers are frequently unknown. "The threats/insults come from anonymous online commenters," the Canadian journalist clarified. I've received numerous threats of attack; one person even said they would "human flesh hunt" me. I've been called every derogatory term imaginable, including "cunt," "bitch," "hag," "slut," "prude," "idiot," and more, and my education, intelligence, and integrity have all been called into question. People have tried to mimic me such that it sounds like I say awful things (Barton, 2014).

Effects of Cyberbullying

Online attacks affect people in real life. In addition to having an impact on productivity and mental health, physical assaults and legal harassment are becoming more common online (UNESCO, 2021). Social media harassment of women can take many different forms, including physical threats, misogyny, sexual desire, insults, scorn, and vulgarity. Online harassment is more common among women with high social position and power, such as female journalists (Demir & Ayhan, 2022). The overwhelming majority of American female journalists (79%) believed that press freedom is seriously impacted by cyberbullying. One essential element of American democracy is a free and fair press. Online harassment prevents women journalists from acting as watchdogs on the government and other institutions (Carlson & Witt, 2020). Threats and criticism that are intended to cause emotional harm to the target are the hallmark of online harassment.

Online threats and criticism are not tangible or face-to-face, yet they may be just as damaging as physical and aggressive in-person abuse. Furthermore, this degree of cruel and abusive language was virtually exclusively used in online interactions. Journalists hardly ever reported such severe criticism or graphic threats in person (Miller & Lewis, 2020).

Therefore, harassment also affects the professional lives of female journalists by causing them to leave social media and/or specific topics, interfering with their work, taking additional safety precautions at work, and thinking about resigning (Phung, 2020). In order to lessen the harm done to their identity and reputation, female journalists who experience online harassment may need to seek legal and technological remedies. Attackers may deploy a mix of offline and online tactics to jeopardise journalists' jobs and safety. According to Ferrier et al. (2018), misogynistic and racist attacks on female writers can have a chilling effect that silences their voices online and discourages freedom of speech, ultimately undermining press freedom.

Cyberbullying of Female Journalists in Pakistan

Pakistani women journalists survive in dangerous environments where they are subjected to misogynistic posts, online harassment, and gender-based disinformation. Gendered disinformation is used to silence their dissenting opinions on social media and digital platforms. According to Javed (2025), this has a significant effect on the mental health of female journalists, both in their personal and professional lives. In some rural parts of Pakistan, there is a notion that women shouldn't use the internet. It is where people engage in illicit relationships or watch obscenity. Women are not supposed to be online in a traditional Muslim society. Many women decide to use the internet covertly so that their family members, particularly men, are unaware of it (Dad, 2016). The most common offences are name-calling, insults, and innuendos, followed by attempts to harm their honour and reputation.

Additionally, online insults and criticism, social media trolling, threats of violence, and public humiliation are additional serious dangers (Solidarity-Center, 2014). Women in Pakistani media appear to be particularly vulnerable to online harassment and abuse simply for carrying out their duties and voicing their thoughts. At least 36 Pakistani female journalists, including well-known anchors, released a united statement in August 2020 denouncing "vicious attacks" on social media and trolling directed at them, purportedly by government officials and supporters of the ruling party. They said that these conditions had made it challenging for them to perform their professional responsibilities. Bukhari (2020). Some female journalists are successfully silenced by the aggressive online harassment. "Gender-based harassment, rape threats, and abusive language are among the serious threats that women journalists face in Pakistan," said Asma Shirazi, a political journalist with Aaj News TV and 2014 recipient of the Peter Mackler Award for Courageous and Ethical Journalism. "I don't tweet much, but as soon as you tweet something, the trolls begin trying to silence you." (RSF, 2020).

Moreover, Ramsha Jahangir, a journalist who focusses on online regulation and digital society, told IPI that the internet has become weaponised in recent years. According to a 2019 study by Jahangir for the Digital Rights Foundation (DRF) titled "Fostering Open Spaces in Pakistan," 55% of women working in journalism, activism, and other information-related fields reported having experienced online harassment and abuse. Among other types of harassment, the majority of respondents defined online abuse as "slurs, slut shaming, fat shaming, theft of photos, spamming with pornographic images, stalking." (Vered, 2020)

Theoretical Framework

This paper will be based on an integrated theoretical perspective which includes Spiral of Silence Theory, the Transactional Model of Stress and Coping, and Feminist Media Theory. These mutually reinforcing views allow us to have a comprehensive approach to the definition of cyberbullying as a silencing mechanism, a psychological stressor, and a structural manifestation of gender-based exclusion in journalism.

Spiral of Silence Theory

The main theoretical perspective of the given study is Spiral of Silence Theory developed by Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann that explains how people tend not to express their opinions when they perceive that they are in the minority and are afraid of social isolation and social punishment (Noelle-Neumann, 1974). This theory states that prevailing masses influence the readiness of individuals to express the dissenting views. Individuals who feel their opinions are not popular normally use silence as a means of avoiding criticism, rejection or marginalization. This theory is very applicable in the current study since journalism and especially in conservative and patriarchal societies with Pakistan being one of them has been traditionally viewed as a male profession (Jamil, 2020).

In addition, female journalists are often a minority in both newsroom settings and in the space of discourse that dominates society, and their views on certain topics, such as women rights, gender equality and social justice might challenge prevailing societal discourse.

Even though digital media platforms have provided the female journalists with an ease of giving their perspectives and interacting with audiences, the same media platforms have also been used as a platform where online harassment, trolling and cyberbullying are deterring participation. Female reporters, who post their views and opinions which do not concur with the mainstream opinions, are often subjected to abusive remarks, threats and organized internet attacks. Therefore, numerous individuals involve themselves in self-censorship or do not discuss any controversial issues at all, which is one of the silencing mechanisms that Spiral of Silence Theory describes (Gearhart and Zhang, 2015). This phenomenon has been exacerbated by the emergence of anonymous digital communication. The social media sites give the attackers anonymity, and they can attack female journalists without any responsibility. This leads to a situation where the voices of the minority are silenced in the form of fear and intimidation, and it is even more challenging to enable female journalists to be part of the digital discourse of the masses freely and without fear.

Transactional Model of Stress and Coping

This theory is developed by Richard Lazarus and Susan Folkman, the Transactional Model of Stress and Coping explains the ways in which individuals evaluate stressful experiences and adopt responses to cope with stress (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984). According to the model, people consider the resources (their availability) to manage a potential threat (primary appraisal) and then evaluate the available resources (their availability) to handle that potential threat (secondary appraisal). The female journalists in this study regard cyberbullying as a major challenge to their professional integrity, psychological well-being, and personal security. They then find coping mechanisms to deal with this stress. These responses involve emotion-centered coping strategies, including blocking abusive users, limiting social media use, avoiding comment sections, and engaging in self-care, and problem-centered coping strategies, such as reporting instances to employers or social media platforms. The theoretical lens is especially effective in comprehending the coping mechanisms of female journalists in Peshawar when they come down to dealing with cyberbullying. It assists in explaining why a large number of respondents consider more heavily using emotional coping mechanisms as opposed to institutional reporting systems, often due to a lack of trust in the support structures that are present within the organizations.

Feminist Media Theory

Feminist Media Theory offers a structural observation of the gender-related disparities in the media institutions and online platforms. The theory posits that patriarchal societal systems influence the media practices and tend to marginalize women by restricting their visibility, participation, and authority in speaking out in society (Gallagher, 2014). Gender-based discrimination, stereotyping, and underrepresentation of women in journalism is quite common. In patriarchal cultures, when women journalists are seen in professional careers that involve direct interaction with the general population, the female journalists are often viewed as having transgressed against the traditional gendered roles. Consequently, digital spaces transform into the continuation of these patriarchal sources of power, where cyberbullying serves as a means of disciplining, intimidating, and silencing women (Ferrier and Garud-Patkar, 2018).

Women journalists in Pakistan are forced with double vulnerabilities, due to the fact that the cultural expectations of the society usually limit the amounts of time that women have to spend in the public arena. The sexualization, misogynization, and personalization of online abuse against them are often not issue-oriented but based on personal views on the subject. These attacks bolster structural obstacles to women equal involvement in journalism and the broader discourse.

These theories combine to form a strong analytical perspective in understanding cyberbullying not as a single occurrence of online misconduct, but as a systemic form of gender-based online violence that interferes with the freedom of expression, professional practice, and gender equality in journalism.

Research Methodology

Research Design

This research was based on a quantitative research design to focus on the prevalence, forms, and effects of cyberbullying on female journalists in Peshawar, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. A quantitative method was deemed to be most suitable since it provides the opportunity to make a systematic measurement, perform a numerical analysis, and interpret the experiences of respondents towards online harassment objectively. The design allowed the researcher to gather standardized responses of participants and statistically analyze patterns in terms of the experience of cyberbullying, its psychological effects and coping mechanisms. The quantitative design was chosen because the topic being studied was sensitive and as such, the design enabled the respondents to present their answers in an anonymous manner using structured questionnaires. This minimized chances of manipulation or failing to share experiences that one might have otherwise resisted sharing in the face-to-face interview. Moreover, the quantitative approach helped to conduct a descriptive analysis of the obtained data and present measurable evidence of an extent of cyberbullying of female journalists in Peshawar.

Population and Sampling

The target population of this study was comprised of female journalists who are actively working in the various media sectors of Peshawar, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa which includes print, television, radio, and digital media sectors. These participants were chosen since their professional duties make them especially susceptible to online harassment and cyberbullying.

The nature of snowball sampling technique used in the study was related to the limited accessibility of female journalists, as well as the sensitivity of the discussion on the topic of online harassment experiences. Snowball sampling is a non-probability sampling technique where the first respondents refer other potential respondents that meet the study requirements. The number of female journalists who took part in the study was 30. The sample size was deemed to be suitable in exploratory quantitative research based on a particular professional group under a given geographical location. The sampling technique allowed the researcher to use the assistance of known professional circles to access respondents, which in turn increased the number of respondents and the accuracy of responses.

Data Collection

A structured questionnaire developed to specifically focus on investigating the experiences of cyberbullying among female journalists was the main data collection tool used in this research. The questionnaire was made of closed-ended questions as well as open-ended questions.

Likert-scale response categories of Closed-ended questions were designed using response categories such as:

• Always • Often • Sometimes • Rarely • Never Likewise. Questions based on impact had response choices like:

• Very High Impact • High Impact • Moderate Impact • Low Impact • No Impact

The questionnaire was further subdivided into four large parts:

Part A: Demographic Data

This part gathered background details of the respondents, such as age, years of experience in the media industry and the media industry.

Part B: Character of Cyberbullying

This section gauged the shapes of cyberbullying that respondents had gone through, such as abusive remarks, sexual harassment, threats, doxing, impersonation, body shaming, and image alteration.

C: Effect of Cyberbullying

This part explored the psychological, professional and social impacts of cyberbullying on female journalists.

D: Coping Strategies

This part discussed how women journalists have been responding and coping with cyberbullying. The questionnaire was issued both online and printed version to ensure maximum access and involvement of the respondents.

Data Analysis Techniques

The data collected were coded, organized and analyzed by using the Statistical Package of Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 26. The responses were analyzed using descriptive statistical techniques, including: • Frequencies • Percentages • Mean scores • Standard deviations These statistical measures were employed to determine patterns on prevalence of cyberbullying, various forms, its psychological and professional effects and the coping strategies that female journalists employed. Frequency distribution tables were created in order to make the experiences of respondents clear and systematic. The statistical results were also calculated in terms of graphical and tabular illustrations to help readers understand and provide an analytical discussion. Analysis of data was then interpreted in the context of the theoretical framework of the study, specifically Spiral of Silence Theory, Transactional Model of Stress and Coping, and Feminist Media Theory, to further understand cyberbullying as a gendered digital issue that affect female journalists in Peshawar.

Ethical Considerations

This research followed ethical standards strictly. The responses were all voluntary and respondents

were informed about the aims and importance of the research before this data was collected. Anonymity and confidentiality were assured and no personal identifying details were disclosed. The respondents were provided with the freedom to pull out of the proceedings at any point and still get away without any repercussions. Because the experiences of cyberbullying are sensitive, questions were carefully put to avoid causing emotional distress.

Demographic Profile of Respondents

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents (N=30)

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Age	21–30 years	14	46.7%
	31–40 years	10	33.3%
	41–50 years	6	20%
Professional Experience	1–5 years	12	40%
	6–10 years	10	33.3%
	Above 10 years	8	26.7%
Media Sector	Television	11	36.7%
	Print Media	8	26.7%
	Digital Media	7	23.3%
	Radio	4	13.3%

Findings

This chapter presents the findings of the study, which were derived from data gathered from 30 female journalists employed in Peshawar, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's media hub. The objectives of this research were to investigate the forms of cyberbullying, examine its effects, and investigate the coping mechanisms used by female journalists to deal with the harassment that they face online.

Nature of Cyberbullying toward Female Journalists in Pakistan

The data revealed that Pakistani female Journalists facing Cyberbullying in various forms, 90 percent journalists are agreed that they have face cyberbullying in comment sections when posting about any issue related to female Journalists and human rights, the voice of the females have been silenced through online aggression as the profession has been considered masculine job.

Forms of Cyberbullying

Statistics											
		I have faced cyberbullying on social media in my professional role	Experience online harassment frequently.	Forms of cyberbullying faced include: Abusive comments/trolling (offensive language, mocking, personal attacks)	Sexual harassment/explicit messages (unwanted sexual remarks, images, or messages)	Threats of violence (physical harm, job threats, threats to family)	Doxxing (sharing private details such as phone number, address, or photos without consent)	Body shaming (criticism of appearance, dress, voice, or style)	False character assassination/rumors (spreading lies or damaging stories about you)	Impersonation/fake accounts (someone creating an account pretending to be you)	Image/video manipulation (misusing or editing photos/videos to harm your reputation)
N	Valid	30	30	30	30	30	30	30	30	30	30
	Missing	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Std. Error of Mean		.133	.089	.179	.206	.206	.190	.219	.208	.233	.234
Std. Deviation		.728	.490	.980	1.129	1.129	1.040	1.202	1.137	1.276	1.280
Minimum		1	2	1	1	1	2	1	1	1	1
Maximum		3	3	4	5	5	5	5	5	5	5

Impact of cyber bullying on female journalists

Statistics					
		Cyberbullying affects my mental health (stress, anxiety, depression)	Cyberbullying creates fear for my physical safety (online threats may extend offline).	Online harassment reduces my confidence to express opinions freely.	Cyberbullying violates my rights as a female journalist (freedom of expression, dignity, equality)
N	Valid	30	30	30	30
	Missing	0	0	0	0
Std. Error of Mean		.196	.230	.260	.166
Std. Deviation		1.075	1.258	1.424	.907
Minimum		1	1	1	1
Maximum		4	5	5	4

Strategies of female journalists to cope with cyber bullying

Statistics						
		I ignore or block abusive users on social media.	I seek support from colleagues, friends, or family.	I report harassment to the social media platform.	I report incidents of online harassment to my employer or relevant authority.	I practice self-care (counseling, stress relief, limiting social media use).
N	Valid	30	30	30	30	30
	Missing	0	0	0	0	0
Std. Error of Mean		.264	.222	.166	.240	.145
Std. Deviation		1.448	1.213	.910	1.317	.791
Minimum		1	1	1	1	1
Maximum		5	5	4	5	3

Forms of Cyberbullying

The findings that result from survey questionnaires show that cyberbullying is a very serious and ongoing phenomenon for female journalists. Nearly 37% reported experiencing online harassment at least “often” and 63.3 Percent “sometimes, when using online platforms” while over 60% demonstrating that online harassment is part of their work life rather than an isolated incident.

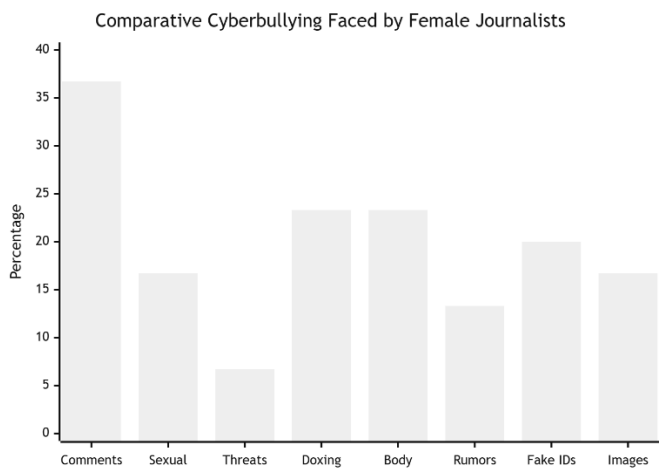


Figure 1: Comparative Forms of Cyberbullying

- The graph relates the various types of cyberbullying that respondents encountered. The most common form was abusive comments and trolling, with impersonation and image manipulation exhibiting a greater variation, meaning that some of the respondents had a more varied experience.

The most common types included comments (abusive comments) and trolling, both of which were experienced by over 70% of respondents frequently. Sexual harassment was reported by close to 57% of the sample, and over half had experienced body shaming, character assassination, and impersonation by fake accounts. Doxing (sharing private details without permission) and image and video manipulation were experienced less frequently but could have serious implications for reputation and safety. The findings also demonstrate that the cyberbullying of women journalists is gendered and intersects with cultural norms that already impede women's presence among professions considered masculine (journalism). The Spiral of Silence theory helps make sense of these occurrences because women journalists likely identify with a minority voice in a male-dominated field, and may choose not to speak out for fear of separation and subsequent backlash (Noelle-Neumann, 1974).

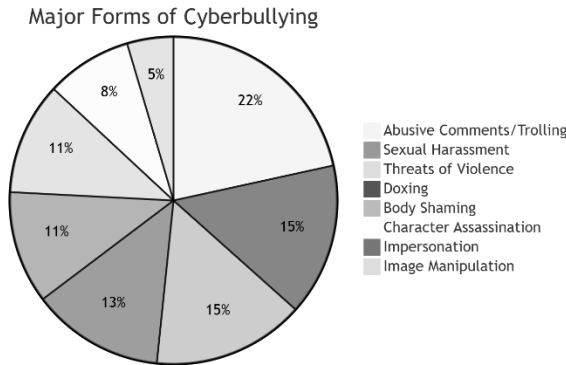


Figure 2: Distribution of Common Cyberbullying Forms

- The pie chart identifies abusive comments and trolling as the most common way of cyberbullying, with body shaming and doxing coming in as the next most prevalent forms of cyberbullying. This shows that the most prevalent digital attacks on female journalists are verbal abuse and identity attacks.

5.3. Impact of Cyberbullying on Female Journalists

The detrimental effects of online bullying have been demonstrated to have substantial social, professional, and psychological impacts. Over half of the participants (53.3%) stated that stress, anxiety, and depression had a significant or very high influence on their mental health. Similarly, 70% of respondents said that their rights as professionals such as equality, freedom of expression, and dignity were violated. Half of the respondents replied that harassment made them

more sceptical in the capacity to openly express their thoughts, and a significant percentage also voiced worry for their personal safety, with 43.3% experiencing a high or very high threat.

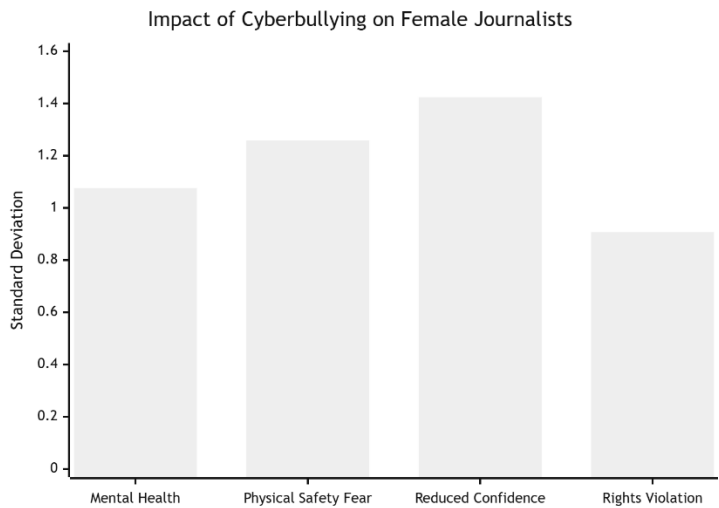


Figure 3: Psychological and Professional Impact

- The graph indicates that the least confidence in expressing opinion freely indicates the greatest variation among respondents whereas the lowest consistency is shown by perceived violation of professional rights. This shows that there is a common belief that cyber bullying compromises the rights of journalism.

These effects highlight how cyberbullying acting as a structural impediment as well as a psychological stressor. The variety of voices in the media is limited because female journalists face professional suppression in addition to emotional hardship. This result is a clear reflection of the dynamics of the Spiral of Silence, in which women are pushed to self-censor due to negative majority opinion and fear of isolation (Gearhart & Zhang, 2015).

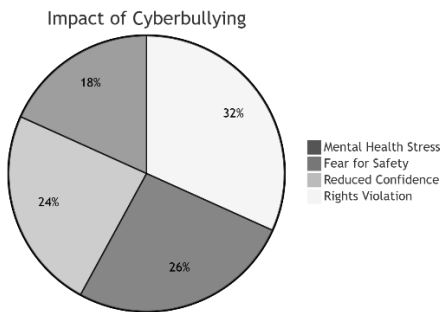


Figure 4: Overall Impact Distribution

- The pie chart indicates that violation of rights is felt as the greatest effect of cyberbullying, followed by mental health distress and lost confidence. This is indicative of the larger structural and psychological effects of being harassed online.

Coping with Cyberbullying: Application of Coping Theory

Utilizing Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) Transactional Model of Stress and Coping, which places a strong emphasis on assessing risks and mobilizing coping resources, the coping strategies of female journalists were examined.

It was evident from the primary evaluation that respondents viewed cyberbullying to be a danger to their safety, professional dignity, and mental health. For the secondary appraisal, they employed both problem-focused and emotion-focused coping mechanisms.

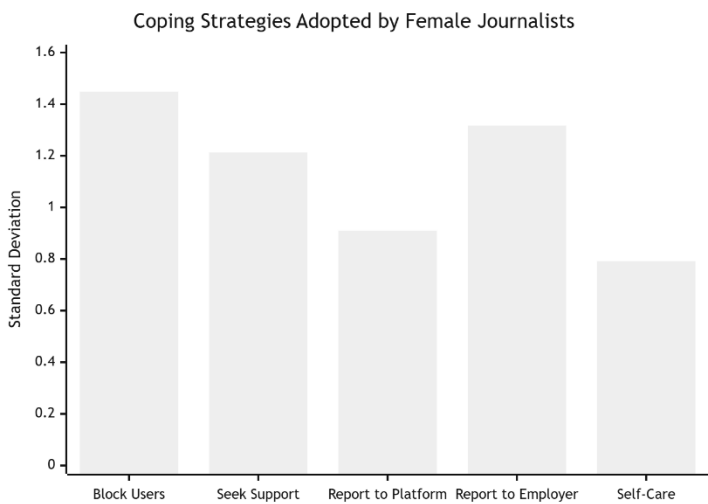


Figure 5: Coping Strategies Comparison

- The graph shows that the least variation is observed in the practices of self-care, this implies that it is the most consistently applied practice of coping. The consistency of reporting harassment to social media sites is also strongly consistent, whereas blocking users and reporting to employers differ significantly.

Emotional coping was the most common. Self-care, which included stress management, counselling, and social media constraints, was the strategy most often used tactic (40% "always" and 36.7% "frequently"). Abuse-prone users have been frequently blocked or ignored (46.7% "always/often"). These techniques ease stress in the short term, but they frequently cause self-censorship and retreat, which fuels the Spiral of Silence. The frequency of problem-focused coping decreased. A minority of respondents (23.3% "always/often") regularly reported events to their employers or organizations, but about two-thirds reported harassment to social media sites. Moderate (26.6%

often) reliance was shown on social assistance from friends, family, or coworkers. Friends, family, or coworkers.

For female journalists, the comparatively low adoption of institutional coping techniques points to either a lack of institutional support or a lack of faith in the organizational system.

Individual coping mechanisms may shield women from psychological disaster, but they don't effectively address the systemic reasons of harassment, which is reflected in this imbalance between emotion-focused and problem-focused coping approaches. Effective coping involves both addressing the stressor and minimizing emotional pain, as argued by Lazarus and Folkman (1984). According to the research, vulnerability and silence persist in Peshawar by pushing female journalists to rely more on avoidance than opposition.

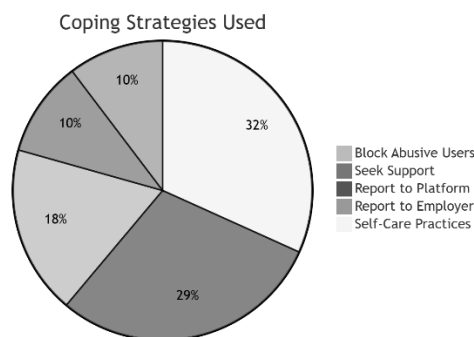


Figure 6: Distribution of Coping Mechanisms

- The pie chart indicates that the most widely used coping mechanism is self-care practices followed by reporting harassment to social media platforms. The rate at which incidence is reported to employers is comparatively low, which means that we have less trust in institutional mechanisms.

From the standpoint of feminist media theory, cyberbullying of female journalists is an example of how gendered inequalities are perpetuated in digital spaces. In addition to being underrepresented, feminist academics contend that women in the media are sometimes subjected to hostility when they choose careers that are dominated by males (Gallagher, 2014). Obstacles are exacerbated in conservative communities like Peshawar, where online harassment silences women's professional efforts and perpetuates conventional gender norms. Feminist media theory, therefore, aids in placing cyberbullying in the context of both a structural barrier to equality in journalism and a type of gender-based violence.

Contribution of the Study

This paper will be useful in the current literature since it will offer localized empirical findings on cyberbullying against female journalists in Peshawar. Although past researches have investigated

online harassment at global and national levels, little research has specifically conducted a research on the lived experiences of female journalists in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The work contributes to the body of knowledge in the research area, as its quantitative results are supported by theoretical knowledge of communication and feminist studies.

Limitations of the Study

There are various limitations to this study. First, the sample was restricted to 30 female journalists and this could limit the ability to generalize the findings to all female journalists in Pakistan. Second, snowball sampling can be subject to sampling bias because the respondents were recruited based on professional networks. Third, the geographical specificity of Peshawar does not allow a more general comparison of the country. Lastly, there is a possibility of recall bias or unwillingness of respondents to share the most sensitive experiences due to the reliance on self-reported data.

Recommendations

In accordance with the results, the paper provides the following recommendations: For Media Organizations Media houses are supposed to put in place digital protection policies, reporting, and counseling support systems to female journalists. For Government Authorities The government should also intensify the enforcement of the cybercrime laws by the Federal Investigation Agency cybercrime units and ensure that offenders are dealt with in good time. In the case of Social Media Platforms. Facebook, X, and Instagram should enhance the moderation frameworks and speed up the response to the harassment reports. For Journalist Associations Journalist unions are advised to establish special support groups to tackle the issue of online abuse by women. For Training Institutions Female journalists should be organized with regular digital security and resilience-building workshops.

Conclusion

The paper concludes by stating that cyber bullying has become a major gendered issue faced by female journalists in Peshawar. The results prove that online harassment occurs in the form of abusive comments, trolling, sexual harassment, doxing, impersonation, and character assassination, which negatively affect the psychological well-being of journalists, their professional confidence, and freedom of expression. Personal emotion-oriented coping strategies (such as blocking abusive users, limiting social network use, self-care, etc.) are predominantly used by female journalists, and institutional mechanisms are rather underutilized. This is an indication of structural deficiencies in organization support structures. The results, through the prism of Spiral of Silence Theory, indicate how cyberbullying silences women with regards to their role in digital public discourse. Feminist Media Theory also articulates that these attacks are indicative of larger patriarchal systems that marginalise women in journalism. This study thus concludes that cyberbullying is not only an online behavioral problem but a systemic form of gender-based violence that pervades press freedom and the equality of the press profession in Pakistan.

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Appendices

FREQUENCY TABLES

I have faced cyberbullying on social media in my professional role

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Always	5	16.7	16.7	16.7
	Often	13	43.3	43.3	60.0
	Sometime	12	40.0	40.0	100.0
	Total	30	100.0	100.0	

Experience Online Harassment frequently.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Often	11	36.7	36.7	36.7
	Sometime	19	63.3	63.3	100.0
	Total	30	100.0	100.0	

Forms of cyberbullying faced include: Abusive comments/trolling (offensive language, mocking, personal attacks)

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Always	10	33.3	33.3	33.3
	Often	11	36.7	36.7	70.0
	Sometime	6	20.0	20.0	90.0
	Rarely	3	10.0	10.0	100.0
	Total	30	100.0	100.0	

FREQUENCY TABLES

Cyberbullying affects my mental health (stress, anxiety, depression)

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Very High Impact	6	20.0	20.0	20.0
	High Impact	10	33.3	33.3	53.3
	Moderate Impact	7	23.3	23.3	76.7
	Low Impact	7	23.3	23.3	100.0
	Total	30	100.0	100.0	

Cyberbullying creates fear for my physical safety (online threats may extend offline)

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Very High Impact	6	20.0	20.0	20.0
	High Impact	7	23.3	23.3	43.3
	Moderate Impact	9	30.0	30.0	73.3
	Low Impact	5	16.7	16.7	90.0
	No impact	3	10.0	10.0	100.0
	Total	30	100.0	100.0	

Online harassment reduces my confidence to express opinions freely

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Very High Impact	6	20.0	20.0	20.0
	High Impact	9	30.0	30.0	50.0
	Moderate Impact	6	20.0	20.0	70.0
	Low Impact	3	10.0	10.0	80.0

Frequency Tables

I ignore or block abusive users on social media

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Always	7	23.3	23.3	23.3
	Often	7	23.3	23.3	46.7
	Sometime	7	23.3	23.3	70.0
	Rarely	3	10.0	10.0	80.0
	Never	6	20.0	20.0	100.0
	Total	30	100.0	100.0	

I seek support from colleagues, friends, or family

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Always	4	13.3	13.3	13.3
	Often	4	13.3	13.3	26.7
	Sometime	11	36.7	36.7	63.3
	Rarely	7	23.3	23.3	86.7
	Never	4	13.3	13.3	100.0
	Total	30	100.0	100.0	

I report harassment to the social media platform

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Always	11	36.7	36.7	36.7
	Often	9	30.0	30.0	66.7
	Sometime	9	30.0	30.0	96.7
	Rarely	1	3.3	3.3	100.0
	Total	30	100.0	100.0	

I report incidents of online harassment to my employer or the relevant authority

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Always	4	13.3	13.3	13.3
	Often	3	10.0	10.0	23.3
	Sometime	10	33.3	33.3	56.7
		6	20.0	20.0	76.7
	Rarely				
	Never	7	23.3	23.3	100.0
	Total	30	100.0	100.0	

I practice self-care (counseling, stress relief, limiting social media use).

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Always	12	40.0	40.0	40.0
	Often	11	36.7	36.7	76.7
	Sometime	7	23.3	23.3	100.0
	Total	30	100.0	100.0	