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Redefining Cyberbullying: A Critical Examination of Conceptual and Operational Definitions in Social Media Research

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Abstract

The rapid expansion of social media platforms has transformed the way individuals interact, communicate, and express themselves. Alongside these opportunities, however, has emerged the growing concern of cyberbullying, a pervasive form of online aggression that disproportionately affects young users. Despite extensive research in this area, there remains a lack of clarity and consistency in how cyberbullying is defined and measured. This conceptual ambiguity poses significant challenges for researchers, policymakers, and practitioners seeking to understand its prevalence, impact, and effective interventions.

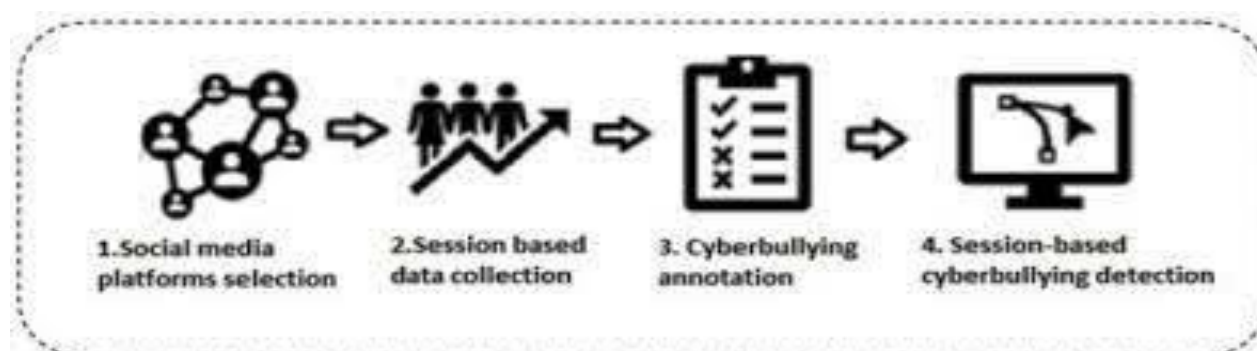
Traditionally, cyberbullying has been conceptualized as intentional, repeated harm inflicted through electronic means, often involving a power imbalance between the perpetrator and the victim. However, the dynamic and evolving nature of digital communication complicates the application of

these criteria. For instance, the notion of repetition becomes difficult to interpret in online contexts where a single harmful post can be shared widely and persist indefinitely. Similarly, power imbalances may manifest differently in virtual spaces, influenced by anonymity, digital literacy, and social networks rather than physical or social dominance.

Operational definitions of cyberbullying—how the concept is translated into measurable variables—also vary widely across studies. Researchers employ different scales, survey instruments, and criteria, leading to inconsistencies in reported prevalence rates and limiting the comparability of findings. Some studies include a broad range of online behaviors under the umbrella of cyberbullying, while others adopt more restrictive definitions, resulting in methodological discrepancies and potential measurement bias.

This study critically examines the conceptual and operational definitions of cyberbullying used in social media research, with the aim of identifying gaps, inconsistencies, and emerging trends. By analyzing existing frameworks and measurement approaches, the study seeks to contribute towards a more standardized and context-sensitive understanding of cyberbullying. Such clarity is essential for advancing empirical research, informing evidence-based policy, and designing effective prevention and intervention strategies in the digital age.

Key words: Cyberbullying, Conceptual Definitions; Operational Definitions; Qualitative Research; Quantitative Research, Sampling Method



The methodology was the systematic approach that allowed the whole research to be done in a way that the study of cyber-bullying and online harassment between young people in Andhra Pradesh was done with rigor, clarity and authenticity. It described the philosophical position, the research design, methods, the design, sampling, data collection and analysis plans that influenced the research. The significance of methodology is that it gave the transparency regarding the way evidence was made, and the reader could judge the reliability and validity of findings. It also showed the translation of theoretical assumptions to practice to make the study systematic and replicable. The chapter authored by explaining the rationality behind every chose methodology approach created a sense of credibility and demonstrated how the study complied with ethical principles. However, finally, the methodology became the foundation of the research that allowed the findings to have solid evidence and the recommendations to be meaningful in the eyes of policymakers, teachers, and law enforcement representatives.

Research approach

The current research has used an approach of deductive research, which is most appropriate to the investigation of cyberbullying and online harassment in youth in Andhra Pradesh (Hall *et al.*, 2023). Deduction started with the known theories and concepts and then compares them with the empirical information to either affirm, refine or dispute the knowledge. In this regard, cyberbullying has already been researched widely in both global and national levels, and theories have already pointed at its abundance, emotional effects, and legal ramifications. But there is limited empirical data on Andhra Pradesh, particularly across different socio-economic groups. This research used a deductive research design by applying theories of social learning, online disinhibition effect, and legal awareness frameworks, which are based on theoretical platforms, to the local youth to determine whether the patterns are applicable within this particular socio-cultural context (Guardado Hernandez, 2025).

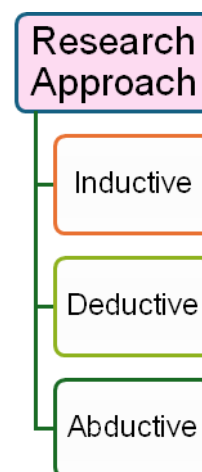


Figure 3.1: Types of research approach

(Source: Self-created)

The deductive methodology is favourable as it enables the study to have pre-existing clear hypotheses based on the previous literature (Robinson and Bailey-Rodriguez, 2026). As an example, the current literature indicates that teenagers are more susceptible to cyberbullying than young adults, that female children are usually more affected by online harassment and that youth do not have knowledge about the legal solutions. The propositions are the foundations of testable hypotheses in the present study. The research so systematically investigates the validity of these assumptions in Andhra Pradesh through systematic study of 600 youth using structured questionnaires (Chandran and Roy, 2024). This makes the findings not anecdotal but theory-based inquiry which increases the reliability and generalizability of findings.

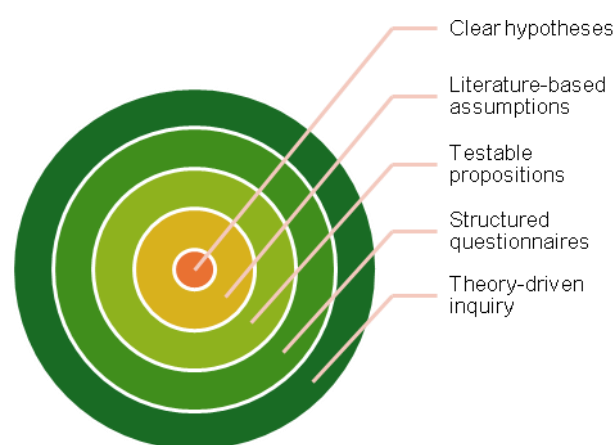


Figure 3.2: Key Features of Deductive Research Methodology

(Source: Self-developed)

The systematic nature of a deduction process is another strength of the process (Kim and Lee, 2024). The research starts by defining theoretical constructs prevalence, impact, coping mechanisms, and legal awareness and measures these constructs into quantifiable variables. As an example, prevalence will be determined by the frequency of reported incidents, impact will be determined by the indicators of psychological distress and academic performance, and legal awareness will be determined by knowledge of IT Act provisions (Abdelwahed and Ramish, 2025). Such a translation of abstract ideas into quantifiable terms is systematic and provides methodological rigour and can be tested statistically. Stratified random sampling also gives the deductive design greater strength by representing age, gender, socio-economic status, and geographic location, thus minimizing sampling bias and enabling comparisons across subgroups.

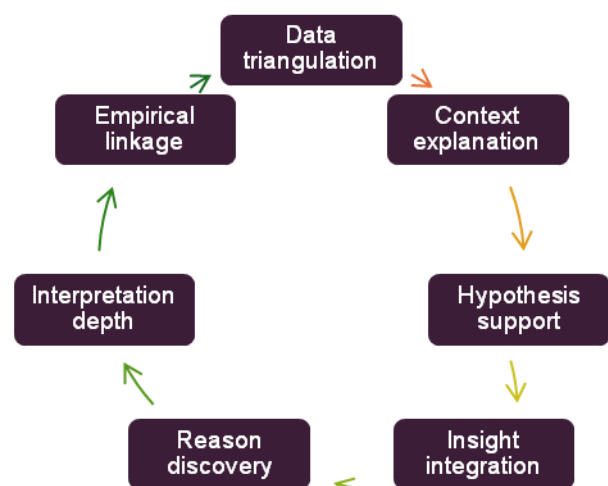


Figure 3.3: Deductive Integration of Quantitative and Qualitative Insights
(Source: Self-created)

The use of a deductive approach also favours the combination of qualitative insights (Yuwono and Rachmawati, 2023). Although the quantitative survey offers statistical confirmation to the hypotheses, the qualitative interviews with the victims, parents, educators, and law enforcers contribute to the analysis by putting the numbers into perspective. Deduction does not negate the idea of qualitative inquiry, but rather it sets the latter in the context of interpreting and explaining quantitative tendencies (Bosch, 2025). As an example, when the results of surveys indicate low

knowledge of the legal remedies, interviews will help to uncover the reasons, including the absence of outreach programs or distrust of the agencies of enforcement. This triangulation enhances the deductive reasoning, which connects the empirical findings to explanatory stories.

Moreover, the deduction is especially applicable in research that is policy-oriented. The study must provide not only descriptive but also theoretically-based findings since the aim is to provide preventive measures and legal reforms. Deductive reasoning makes sure that the recommendations are supported by proven hypotheses and not by individual observations (Rachmania, 2025). As an illustration, in case the hypothesis that rural youth are less aware of legal issues is proven right, the research can suggest special awareness campaigns in rural schools and colleges (Shah *et al.*, 2023). This renders the results practical and applicable to policymakers.

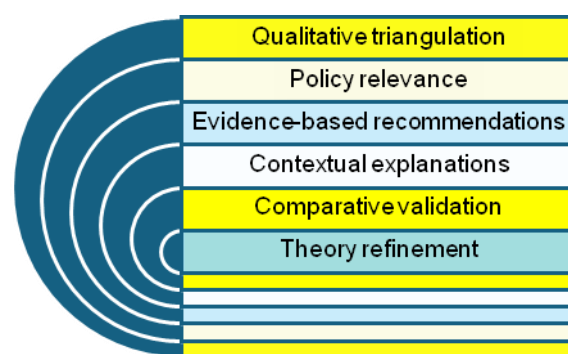


Figure 3.4: Expanded Advantages of Deductive Method with Mixed-Method Integration
(Source: Self-created)

More importantly, the deductive method corresponds to the comparative aspect of the study. The study can be relevant to the wider discussions on cyberbullying in India and the world through testing the existing theories on the topic in Andhra Pradesh. When the results do not correspond with the previous assumptions, such as when male youths state higher degrees of harassment, one questions the existing theories and leads to their improvement (Almanza Avendaño *et al.*, 2022). Therefore, deduction does not only confirm but also goes further in enhancing knowledge through pointing out contextual differences.

In short, the deductive methodology offers a rational, theory-based framework to the study. It guarantees that hypotheses concerning prevalence, impact, and awareness of law, are tested systematically using quantitative surveys, complemented by qualitative interviews, and put into perspective using case studies. This logical development of theory to evidence increases the validity of results, justifies policy suggestions, and adds to the academic and practical knowledge concerning cyberbullying among young people in Andhra Pradesh (Vijayarani *et al.*, 2024). The use of deduction as the basis of the research makes the study to have methodological rigor, theoretical relevance and practical applicability.

Research philosophy

This research work had a philosophical background of positivism, which focuses on its objectivity and empirical measurement and the aim of acquiring generalizable knowledge (Maksimovic and Evtimov, 2023). Positivism is based on the assumption that social phenomena could be investigated with the help of the techniques used in natural sciences, which are based on the observable facts and quantifiable data instead of subjective interpretation. The given philosophy is especially suitable to research the issue of cyberbullying and online harassment among youth in Andhra Pradesh because the research aims at quantifying prevalence rates, determining effects, and understanding the level of legal awareness among the study participants by means of structured and empirical research (Vashist, 2024).



Figure 3.5: Types of research philosophy
(Source: Self-developed)

Positivism justifies the application of quantitative survey as the main method of data collection (Maksimovic and Evtimov, 2023). The use of structured questionnaires to conduct the study on 600 young people will provide numbers, which can be statistically processed to reveal patterns and correlations. As an illustration, rates of prevalence may be computed, demographic susceptibility may be contrasted, and correlations among computer bullying experiences and

psychological consequences may be established. Positivism assures that these results are not a result of the bias of the researcher but a product of observable and measurable evidence. Objectivity is essential in dealing with sensitive matters such as cyberbullying, in which the use of anecdotal stories might not give accurate information.

A stratified random sampling strategy is also based on the positivist philosophy. Positivist values are those that give importance to representativeness and generalizability, and stratified sampling is one method of making sure that the various subgroups, urban and rural, male and female, adolescents and young adults, are represented proportionately (William, 2024). This enables the study to generate results, which are relevant to the larger youth group in Andhra Pradesh but not the isolated cases. Positivism helps to increase the validity of conclusions by minimizing sampling error and improving precision, which helps to promote evidence-based policymaking (Ali, 2024).

The importance of testing the hypothesis is another important point in positivism (Maretha, 2023). The paper starts with the hypotheses based on the current literature, such as it is believed that cyberbullying is more prevalent among adolescents or that rural youth are less aware of the law. Positivism is what gives a philosophical rationale to test these hypotheses using empirical evidence (Younus and Zaidan, 2022). Correlation, regression, and subgroup analysis are the statistical methods that enable the researcher to either prove or disprove these propositions. This methodical testing has the advantage of making conclusions not guesses but are supported by evidence to increase the trustworthiness of the study.

Positivism also supports the incorporation of a qualitative approach into a quantitative paradigm (Khandayet *et al.*, 2024). Although positivism focuses on quantifiable information, it does not disregard the importance of qualitative information when it is utilised in elucidating statistical results. The presence of interviews involving victims, parents, educators, and law enforcement officials also gives capacity to the analysis in terms of context but is not subjective (Josephs-Greene, 2025). As an example, thematic coding of interview transcripts may help identify common trends that can be used to supplement survey findings. This is a qualified application of qualitative data that is consistent

with the principles of positivism because even non-numerical data is considered to be treated in a rigorous and objective way.

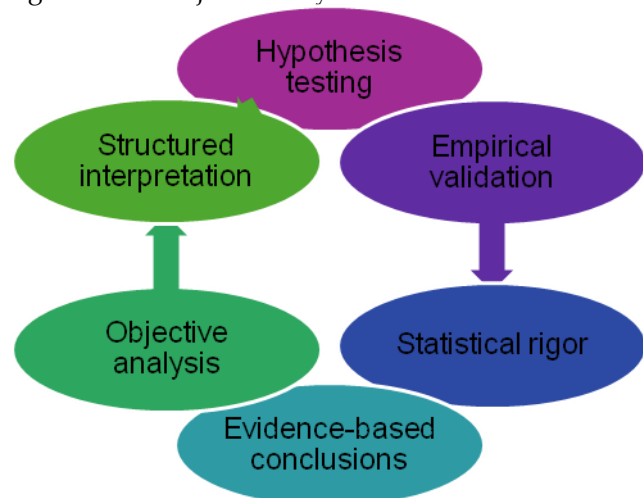


Figure 3.6: Key Benefits of Positivist Philosophy in Hypothesis-Driven Research
(Source: Self-created)

Notably, positivism would be in line with the legal analysis aspect of the study (Maksimovic and Evtimov, 2023). Policies and laws are formal institutions, which could be objectively analyzed regarding their provisions, enforcement policies, and the level of awareness among young people. Positivism advocates the systematic assessments of these legal structures, the disjunction between the policy goals and the actual practice. As an illustration, the research will be able to determine the rate of young people who are knowledgeable of the provisions of the IT Act and contrast it with real enforcement statistics (Pastaltzidis *et al.*, 2022). Such objective examination underlines the study proposals to legal changes and education to be done.

Positivism also makes the research policy relevant. The policymakers need to get evidence that is usable, generalizable and reliable. The adoption of a positivist philosophy makes the study not just about generating findings that are descriptive but also predictive (Maretha, 2023). As an example, regression analysis would be able to determine the factors that make one more susceptible to cyberbullying, like the excessive use of social media or the absence of parental control over it. The findings enable policymakers to devise specific interventions, which can be digital literacy programs or parental awareness campaigns. Positivism also makes the recommendations more credible and effective by making sure they are not

subjective, but instead founded on empirical evidence (Khanday *et al.*, 2024).

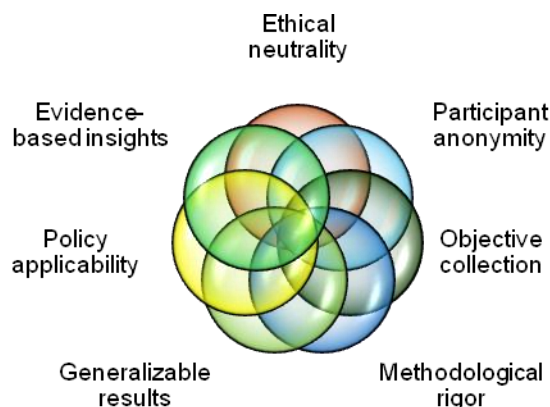


Figure 3.7: Ethical and Practical Strengths of Positivist Research Philosophy
(Source: Self-created)

Moreover, positivism upholds the ethical responsibility of the study. Cyberbullying is a delicate topic, and positivism is that which focuses more on data collection and analysis, being neutral and objective (Mishna *et al.*, 2022). The structured questionnaires and the anonymisation of responses reduce the impact of the researcher and protect the privacy of the participants. This moral strictness improves confidence in the results and makes the research a responsible contribution to the discussion of youth safety.

To sum up, it is possible to note that positivism is the philosophical underpinning of this research. It justifies the application of quantitative surveys, stratified sampling, hypothesis testing and objective legal analysis (Maretha, 2023). It makes the findings reliable, generalizable and actionable, facilitating academic learning and policymaking. The research meets the methodological rigor, ethical standards and practicality by basing it on the tenets of positivism. Such a philosophy allows the study to transcend anecdotal narratives and deliver evidence-based information on the existence, effects and legal solutions to cyberbullying amongst the youth in Andhra Pradesh, therefore contributing significantly to the science and social policy (Vijayarani *et al.*, 2024).

3.4 Research method

The research approach used was the primary research technique since the study needed first hand evidence concerning the prevalence, effect and legal awareness of cyberbullying among youths in Andhra Pradesh (Cheong *et al.*, 2023). The researcher acknowledged the fact that secondary sources of data, though being helpful in terms of background, were not able to reflect the realities of adolescents and young adults in this region. The fact that the researchers decided to use primary data collection ensured that the findings were based on the lived experiences of the participants as opposed to generalized assumptions made in other settings. The researcher has structured the study in such a way that he can come up with original findings using surveys, interviews, and case documentation, hence establishing a strong basis of analysis and recommendation.



Figure 3.8: Research Design and Data Collection Framework
(Source: Self-created)

The researcher used structured questionnaires, which he used to collect data directly from the participants. This tool enabled the researchers to measure the magnitude of cyberbullying, the populations at risk, and the level of awareness of the legal solutions (Van Dyke *et al.*, 2025). The researcher formatted the questionnaire in such a way that incorporated closed-ended questions that would capture incidence frequency, platform used and psychological outcomes. This was a design that was clear and consistent in responses and therefore, could be analysed statistically. The researcher supplemented the survey with qualitative interviews conducted with the victims, parents, educators and law enforcement officials. These interviews provided more valuable

information about coping mechanisms, institutional reactions, and legal framework perception (Chand, 2025). Case studies that depicted actual life tracks of cyberbullying occurrences with their outcome and interventions were also recorded by the researcher. This methodological triangulation added value to the research in that numerical data is supplemented with the story.

Primary research was important to the researcher as it allowed the researcher to have control over the design, sampling, and measurement process. The variables like prevalence, impact and knowledge of the law were defined and operationalised into measurable indicators (Hui *et al.*, 2022). The researcher made sure that the instruments conformed to the objectives of the study and measured both the quantitative and qualitative aspects. Anonymity of responses, informed consent and confidentiality maintained ethical rigor (Badampudiet *al.*, 2022). Such steps enhanced the data credibility and prevent the violation of the rights of participants.

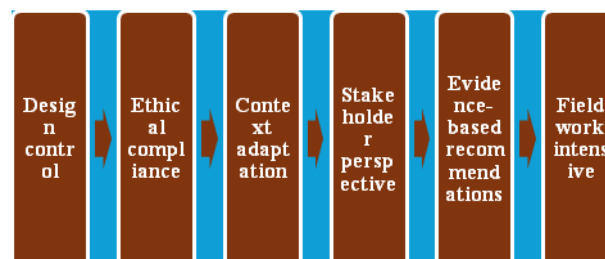


Figure 3.9: Significance and Rigor of Primary Research Methodology
(Source: Self-created)

The researcher designed the main approach to the particular situation in Andhra Pradesh. The questionnaires were to be made available to both the urban and rural youth, taking into consideration the language barrier and socioeconomic disparities. The multiple-stakeholder viewpoint was taken when it comes to interviews, which were not seen through the limited victim-focused prism. The case studies indicated systematic failures in legal implementation and awareness (Altman and Goldberg, 2023). The researcher managed to create a base of evidence-based recommendations to make recommendations that directly referred to the realities of the target population because he generated original data.

The researcher was able to admit that primary research was very demanding in terms of planning, coordination and fieldwork (Nguyen *et al.*, 2022). It did take time to train the enumerators, pilot the questionnaires and work out interview protocols. The logistical issues of access to rural communities and encouraging involvement of different people were closely considered. The reason why these investments were deemed necessary was that they guaranteed that genuine, dependable, and practical findings were made in the course of the study. The researcher came to the conclusion that the primary approach was essential to a study aimed at policy impact, youth empowerment, and legal empowerment (Camir  t *et al.*, 2022). This method enabled the study to attain rigor of the methodology, contextual relevance, and practical applicability.

3.5 Research design

The research used a primary quantitative design since the research involved finding substantial evidence regarding the prevalence, effects and awareness of cyberbullying among the young population in Andhra Pradesh, which is measurable (Castellano, 2024). The researcher understood that those qualitative data would not be sufficient to achieve the statistical rigor that would determine patterns, hypotheses, and generalise the research findings to the population. The quantitative design enabled the study to generate numerical data which could easily be analyzed in a systematic manner, hence ensuring reliability and validity (Halevi Hochwald *et al.*, 2023).

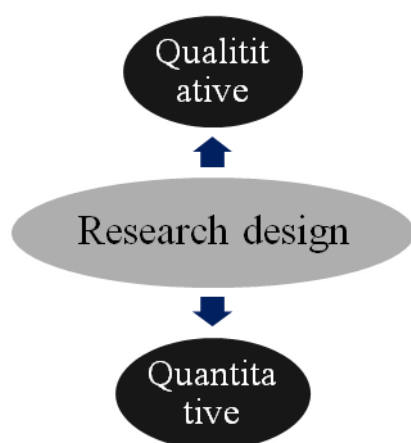


Figure 3.10: Types of research design
(Source: Self-created)

The researcher designed the questionnaire to produce a representative number of responses on major variables including the frequency of the cyberbullying incidences, platform, demographic

vulnerabilities and psychological consequences, and legal redress awareness (Jaggi, 2024). Open ended questions were not used in the questionnaire to make it easier to carry out statistical analysis. The design could be broken down to subgroups comparison within age, gender, socio-economic status, and geographic location. This framework gave coherence and uniformity and the researcher was able to assess the level of the problem accurately (MacLachlan *et al.*, 2022).

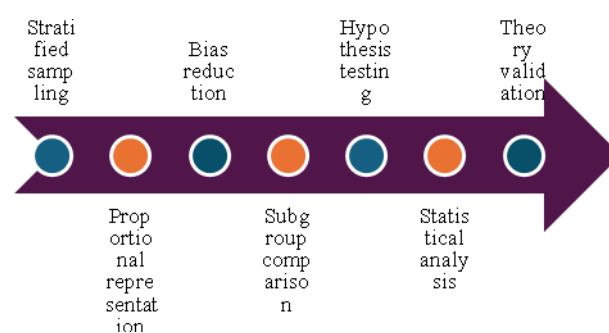


Figure 3.11: Stratified Sampling and Analytical Design Framework

(Source: Self-created)

The design was reinforced by the use of stratified random sampling by the researcher. The populations were categorized into strata according to the age groups (1518 and 1926) and gender, socio-economic status, and the urban-rural area. The participants have then been randomly chosen in each stratum to have proportional representation (Lin *et al.*, 2024). Such a design minimized sampling bias and enabled the researcher to compare differences between subgroups. This was viewed by the researcher as critical in establishing the most vulnerable demographics to the hazards of cyberbullying and, in the process ensuring that the results do not discriminate the areas of the youth population in Andhra Pradesh (Vijayarani *et al.*, 2022).

The researcher designed the research in a way that enabled the hypothesis testing. Such hypotheses were formulated as the higher prevalence of cyberbullying in adolescents than in young adults and the reduced awareness of legal remedies in rural youth than in urban youth (Campbell and Xu, 2022). With the aid of data collection, statistical testing of these propositions was possible. The relationships between variables, including the correlation between the experiences of cyberbullying and psychological distress, were

investigated using correlation and regression analysis (Cinelli *et al.*, 2025). The researcher felt that this design was a specific design that would add rigor to either confirm or contradict the existing theories in the local setting.

The researcher incorporated qualitative aspects in the design to make the interpretation rich, but quantitative analysis was the essence (Villamin *et al.*, 2025). Statistical trends were described by means of interviews and case studies, which were considered supplementary as opposed to central. The design was predominantly quantitative in nature, with the conclusions being based on numerical data and qualitative insights to give the picture a rich context (Barker *et al.*, 2026). This balance was deemed to be suitable in that it was objective and at the same time recognised the complexity of human experiences.

The primary quantitative design was appreciated by the researcher due to giving results that were reliable, generalizable, and actionable (Steležuk and Wolanin, 2023). In order to implement such policies, policymakers, educators, and law enforcement officials needed evidence that can be measured and compared across groups. The design produced prevalence, demographic, and statistical associations that informed treatment-specific interventions. The researcher has concluded that quantitative design was the most effective approach of meeting the objectives of the study and offer a sound basis on recommendations.

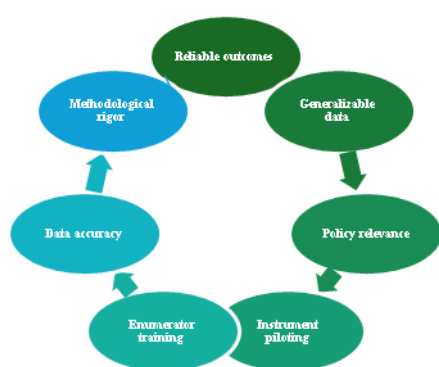


Figure 3.12: Strengths of Primary Quantitative Research Design
(Source: Self-created)

The scholar understood that the quantitative design was something that needed proper planning and implementation. Piloting of instruments were required so that there is clarity

and reliability. Questionnaires had to be administered in a uniform way by the enumerators who needed training. Data management procedures were introduced to ensure accuracy and confidentiality (Dhudasia *et al.*, 2023). These attempts guaranteed that the design came up with strong findings that were resistant to criticism. The researcher was of the opinion that the investment in the area of methodological rigor was worth it as it increased the credibility and the impact of the study.

In summary, the main quantitative design allowed the researcher to come up with quantifiable data regarding cyberbullying among the youth in Andhra Pradesh (Vijayarani *et al.*, 2024). The design was representative in terms of stratified sampling, was used to test hypotheses using statistical analysis and was used to provide objectivity by using structured instruments. This design enabled the study to have methodological rigor, contextual relevance and policy applicability (Gorjian, 2025). The scholar established that quantitative data, with a qualitative contribution to it, were the best model to conceptualize and solve the problem of cyberbullying in the area.

Operational Definitions

The following operational definitions are formulated to provide clarity, consistency, and measurable parameters for the study on cyberbullying and online harassment among youth aged 13–25 years.

1. Cyberbullying

Cyberbullying refers to any intentional and repeated act of aggression carried out through digital devices (such as smartphones, computers, or tablets) using internet-based platforms, which causes psychological, emotional, or social harm to an individual aged 13–25 years.

For the purpose of this study, cyberbullying includes:

- Sending threatening or abusive messages through social networking platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, X, TikTok, or Snapchat
- Posting derogatory comments publicly
- Spreading false rumors online
- Sharing private or embarrassing images/videos without consent
- Impersonating someone using fake digital accounts

In this study, a participant will be considered a victim of cyberbullying if they report experiencing

at least one of the above behaviors repeatedly (two or more times) within the past 12 months.

2. Online Harassment

Online harassment refers to any unwanted, offensive, threatening, or intimidating behavior conducted through digital platforms, whether repeated or occurring as a single severe incident, that causes distress to individuals aged 13–25 years.

For this study, online harassment includes:

- Hate speech targeting gender, caste, religion, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, or disability
- Cyberstalking (persistent monitoring or unwanted contact)
- Sexual harassment through digital messages
- Doxing (sharing private personal information without consent)
- Image-based abuse (non-consensual sharing of intimate content)

A participant will be categorized as having experienced online harassment if they report at least one incident within the last 12 months that resulted in emotional, psychological, or social discomfort.

3. Social-Media

Social media refers to internet-based platforms and applications that enable users to create, share, and interact with content and with other users in virtual communities.

For the purpose of this study, social media includes but is not limited to platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, Snapchat, and X, as well as messaging applications and online discussion forums used by youth.

In this study, social media use will be measured in terms of:

- Frequency of use (daily/weekly/monthly)
- Average time spent per day
- Type of engagement (posting, commenting, messaging, viewing content)

4. Prevalence

Prevalence refers to the proportion or percentage of youth aged 13–25 years in the study sample who report experiencing cyberbullying or online harassment within a specified time frame (e.g., past 12 months).

5. Impact

Impact refers to the measurable psychological, emotional, academic, social, and behavioral

consequences experienced by youth aged 13–25 years as a result of cyberbullying or online harassment.

For this study, impact will be assessed through:

- Self-reported levels of anxiety, stress, or depression
- Changes in academic performance or attendance
- Social withdrawal or relationship difficulties
- Sleep disturbances
- Reduced self-esteem
- Behavioral responses (blocking accounts, reporting abuse, deleting profiles)

Impact may be quantified using standardized psychological scales, Likert-scale questionnaires, or self-reported behavioral indicators.

6. Legal Remedies

Legal remedies refer to the formal mechanisms available under national, state, or institutional laws and policies that allow victims of cyberbullying and online harassment to seek redress, protection, or justice.

For the purpose of this study, legal remedies include:

- Filing police complaints or cybercrime reports
- Invoking provisions under Information Technology or criminal laws
- Seeking restraining/protection orders
- Institutional grievance redressal mechanisms (school/college committees)
- Platform-based reporting and content removal procedures

The study will assess:

- Awareness of legal remedies among youth
- Utilization of legal remedies
- Perceived effectiveness of these remedies

7. Youth (Aged 13–25 Years)

For this study, youth refer to individuals between the ages of 13 and 25 years at the time of data collection.

This group will be categorized into:

- Early Adolescence: 13–15 years
- Middle Adolescence: 16–18 years
- Emerging Adulthood: 19–21 years
- Young Adulthood: 22–25 years

Participants must fall within this age range to be included in the study sample.

Summary

These operational definitions ensure clarity, consistency, and measurable parameters for analyzing cyberbullying and online harassment

among youth aged 13–25 years. They provide a structured framework for data collection, interpretation, and analysis, thereby strengthening the reliability and validity of the research findings.

3.6 Data collection

The research was based on a multi-pronged data collection approach, which involved quantitative survey-based data collection and qualitative data collection through a combination of interviews, case studies, and legal analysis (Maida *et al.*, 2022). The scholar identified that cyberbullying and online harassment in young people in Andhra Pradesh was a multidimensional social construct that needed to be supported by both quantitative and qualitative information. The data-gathering exercise was thus aimed at capturing prevalence rates, demographic vulnerabilities, psychological effects, and coping strategies, as well as awareness of legal solutions in addition to recording how institutions respond and legal frameworks (Kumar *et al.*, 2022).

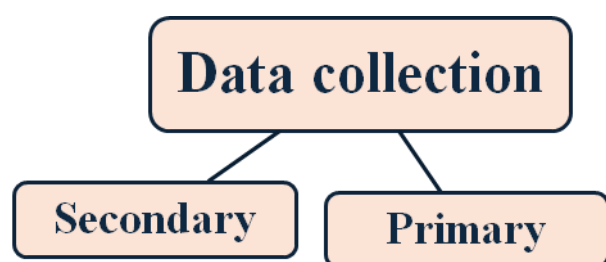


Figure 3.13: Types of research data collection
(Source: Self-created)

The survey was carried out by the researcher on 600 youths of urban and rural regions of Andhra Pradesh aged between 15 and 26 years (Venkatesham, 2023). The survey was focused on adolescents (15–18 years old) who could be considered school-going and young adults (19–26 years old) who were undergraduates or early career professionals. Stratified random sampling was used to make it proportional in terms of age, gender, socio-economic status and geographic location. The researcher categorized the population into homogenous strata and selected the participants randomly in each stratum. This technique minimized inside group variability and maximized result accuracy. Structured questionnaires were used to get information about the frequency of cyberbullying situations, platforms, forms of harassment, psychological and

social effects and their knowledge on available legal remedies (Abarna *et al.*, 2023). The researcher structured the questionnaire to contain closed ended questions to facilitate statistical analysis of the questionnaire and some open ended questions to enable the participants to give more details of their personal experiences.

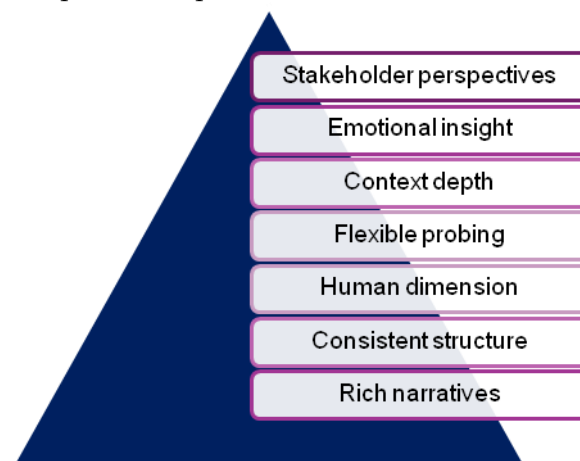


Figure 3.14: Benefits of Semi-Structured Qualitative Interviews

(Source: Self-created)

To balance the research survey, the researcher conducted qualitative interviews to learn more about the problem. Victims of cyberbullying were interviewed to know how they cope with their problems, how they feel about it, and how they view institutional support (Karaosmanoğlu *et al.*, 2022). The interviews were conducted with parents to discuss their knowledge about the risks of the online world and their approach in the process of children guidance. Teachers were also interviewed to determine the role played by schools and colleges in dealing with cyber bullying, and law enforcers were also interviewed to determine the challenges and existing gaps in the enforcement of the law. These interviews were very narrative and brought some background to the results of the survey by bringing out the human aspect behind the numbers (Kendrick *et al.*, 2022). The researcher also used semi-structured interview guides to maintain a certain degree of consistency and flexibility so that the participants could relate the personal experiences.

The case studies of real-life cyberbullying were also recorded by the researcher (Lucini, 2022). These case studies showed the patterns of harassment, such as escalation, reporting, intervention, and consequences. They pointed at systemic deficiencies, including the inability to

respond to the legal system, victim unawareness, and institutional assistance. Case studies had real-world examples that showed the impact of cyberbullying on interpersonal relationships, mental health, and educational performance (Longobardi *et al.*, 2022). They also disclosed the motives and pattern of behavior of perpetrators providing an insight into how



online harassment works.

Figure 3.15: Multi-Method Data Collection and Legal Analysis Framework
(Source: Self-created)

The researcher carried out the legal research to discuss the existing laws, policies and how they are applied at the state level (Magesh *et al.*, 2025). The provisions of the Indian Penal Code, Information Technology Act and other laws were examined. The researcher evaluated the application of these laws in practice and found some gaps between policy intention and application. The interviews with the law enforcement officials and legal experts were given to offer insight on issues including ignorance of the youth, lack of reporting structures and failure to offer support systems to the victims (Clemmow *et al.*, 2025). The legal analysis enabled the scholar to assess the efficacy of the current structures and suggest the means to enhance the legal protection.

The researcher appreciated the approach to this multi-pronged data collection strategy since it gave it breadth and depth. The survey produced quantitative data that could be judged statistically whereas interviews and case studies produced qualitative data that reasoned the figures (Newburger and Elmqvist, 2023). Legal analysis

introduced a structural aspect, where the personal experiences were connected with the establishment. The combination of these techniques formed a complete dataset, which met the goals of the study and justified evidence-based findings (Zhang *et al.*, 2023).

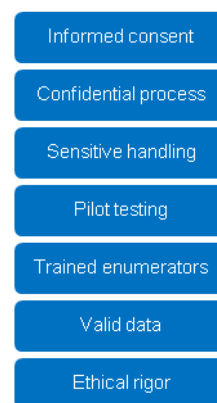


Figure 3.16: Ethical Planning and Data Collection Integrity Framework
(Source: Self-created)

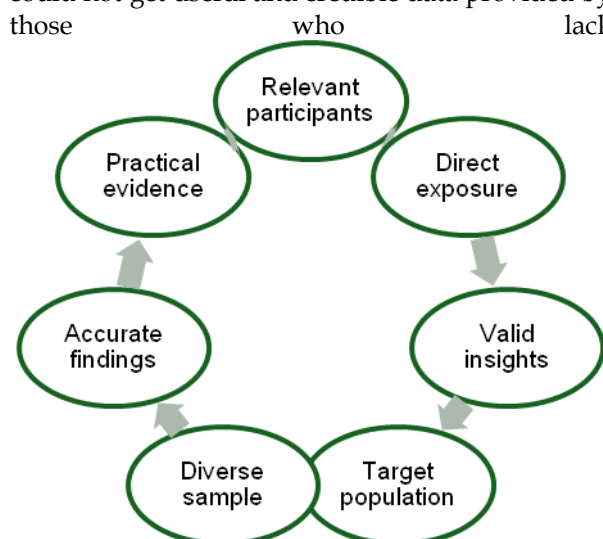
The researcher also accepted that the process of data collection needed to be planned and ethical. All the participants were provided with informed consent and the process was confidential. Delicate issues like psychological distress were approached with carefulness and sensitivity (Schaefer *et al.*, 2022). It was ensured that the researcher pilot-tested instruments in order to optimize clarity and reliability. Questionnaires were designed to be administered by enumerators who were trained on how to do so in a non-disrespectful manner. This enhanced the validity of the information and the protection of the rights of participants.

The research methodology used in the study concisely comprised of surveys, interviews, case studies, and legal research to best describe the multifacetedness of cyberbullying among young people in Andhra Pradesh (Yibas, 2024). This methodology has made sure that study yielded genuine, dependable, and practical results that portrayed personal experiences and institutional realities.

Inclusion Criteria

The survey had a well-defined inclusion criterion that was centered on individuals who actively have access to social media platforms. This group of young individuals aged 15-26 years was the one that was specified by the researcher as regularly using such platforms as Facebook, Instagram,

WhatsApp, Twitter, and newly introduced applications that had gained popularity among adolescents and young adults (Zaini and Hamidah, 2023). This quality was necessary to make the study reflect participants who are directly exposed to the online places where cyberbullying and online harassment tend to take place. The researcher ensured that the responses depicted lived experiences and not hypothetical assumptions because he only used those with access to social media. The inclusion criterion was also consistent with the objectives of the study that aimed to provide an estimate of prevalence, effects, and awareness of legal remedies in individuals with the highest likelihood of engaging in online harassment. The scholar was aware that cyberbullying is a phenomenon that is closely connected with digital interaction and thus could not get useful and credible data provided by those who lack



access to it (Zaini and Hamidah, 2023).

Figure 3.17: Advantages of Social-Media-Based Inclusion Criterion
(Source: Self-created)

Inclusion requirement enabled the researcher to devote resources to people whose experiences would be significant in the analysis. It also made sure that the survey findings reflected the population which was the most susceptible to cyberbullying in Andhra Pradesh. The researcher has made sure that there is diversity with this group since he has used stratified random sampling that involved adolescents in schools, young adults in colleges and early career professionals. This methodology has been used to describe differences in exposure, coping styles and awareness levels in different life stages. The

validity of the study was enhanced by the inclusion criterion which ensured that the information obtained was directly related to the phenomenon under study (Miranda *et al.*, 2024). It also contributed to the applicability of the results to policymakers, educators, and legal enforcement officials, as they needed a set of evidence based on what the social media users were real. The researcher has paid attention to individuals who have access to social media, thus ensuring that the research was able to cover the main population of individuals that are affected by cyberbullying and generate actionable information to prevent and intervene (Ghosh *et al.*, 2025).

Exclusion Criteria

The survey has used an exclusion criterion that has eliminated the youth who are not adequately exposed to social media or interacting with the social media (Lamash *et al.*, 2024). This population was determined by the researcher as the people between the age of 15 and 26 years who had no access to the social media sites or used them in the least amount that they were not likely to face cyberbullying or online harassment. This was done by exclusion since the study sought to examine the experiences that were directly related to digital environments. The participants that were not associated with exposure would have weakened the results and added useless data (Adnyana *et al.*, 2023). The researcher acknowledged that cyberbullying is an online interaction phenomenon and thus, people who had not been exposed to it were not able to give any valuable information on prevalence, effects, and awareness of the law. The exclusion criterion was used to make sure that the survey targeted the participants whose experience was directly related to the research objectives. It also contributed to the accuracy of the results because it removed noises of the responses that did not imply real involvement with social media.

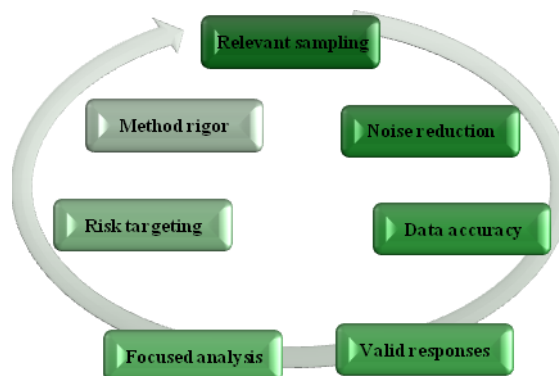


Figure 3.17: Advantages of Social Media Exposure-Based Exclusion Criterion

(Source: Self-created)

The researcher recognized that not all of the youth in the villages or economically disadvantaged regions may have an access to digital platforms. Although their exclusion made the sample smaller, it enhanced the validity of results since they were only analysed with relevant participants. The exclusion criterion also helped to exclude misinterpretation of data, since non-users may have been misleading in their answers and hence the prevalence rates of the study or misleading awareness levels (Al-Sibaheet *et al.*, 2023). The researcher ensured the study had a methodological rigor by omitting the individuals who had no substantial exposure to the subject and thus grasping a research finding that was relevant to the high-risk group. This criterion added to the inclusion strategy by narrowing the scope of the survey and putting the sample in line with the reality of cyberbullying (Coutinho *et al.*, 2025). The researcher came to the conclusion that the exclusion of non-users was the key to the fulfillment of the objectives of the study as it enabled the analysis to be accurate, topical, and practical. This exclusion criterion finally made sure that the study dealt with the experiences of individuals who have been active on social media and are thus the most susceptible to online harassment.

3.7 Data analysis

A dual data analysis strategy was used in the study where statistical analysis was combined with thematic analysis of qualitative interviews and case studies (Suet *et al.*, 2022). The researcher identified that cyberbullying and internet harassment was a phenomenon that was demanding of both definitive accuracy and depth of interpretation. The aim of the analysis was thus to measure prevalence and effects besides revealing patterns, themes and meanings on the experiences of the participants.

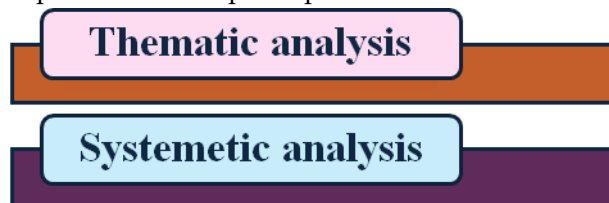


Figure 3.18: Types of research analysis
(Source: Self-created)

The author of the research performed statistical work with the data of his survey of 600 youth (Purba *et al.*, 2023). The prevalence rates, frequency distributions, and demographic breakdown were determined by means of descriptive statistics. To illustrate, the researcher used the percentage of adolescents and young adults who told about having been cyberbullied to determine the prevalence rate of this issue, the most popular platforms, and the percentage of respondents who knew what legal actions could be taken. Cross-tabulations were used to establish the prevalence between subgroups based on gender, socio-economic status and urban rural location. Hypotheses that were tested using inferential statistics were based on previous literature. Cyberbullying experiences and psychological distress were also considered as variables and were analyzed in terms of correlation (Purba *et al.*, 2023). Regression analysis has revealed vulnerability predictors, including too much social media or parental lack of control. These statistical methods enabled the researcher to prove or disapprove the existing theories and come up with generalizable results (Cinelli *et al.*, 2025).

The researcher highly respected statistical analysis as it was objective and precise. The numerical evidence enabled the research to find the patterns not found in anecdotal stories (Nissel and Woolley, 2024). As an illustration, statistical tests were used to determine whether adolescents experienced greater prevalence than young adults, whether females were more harassed than males, and whether the rural youth was less aware of legal redresses than the urban youth (Nurmaliza *et al.*, 2022). These results were a strong basis to give policy recommendations and interventions.

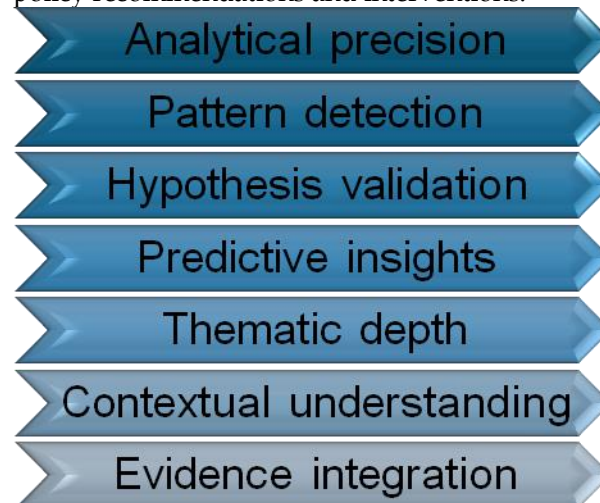


Figure 3.19: Benefits of Dual Statistical and Thematic Analysis Approach

(Source: Self-created)

The researcher used both statistical analysis and thematic analysis of qualitative interviews and case studies. The interviews were transcribed and the transcripts were decoded into themes that recurred including the coping mechanisms, parental guidance, institutional responses, and enforcement problems. Analysis of case studies was done to reveal the patterns of harassment, such as escalation, reporting, and outcomes (Gianakos *et al.*, 2022). The researcher used a multi-cycle coding process whereby a first stage was the open coding to record the first set of categories, then the second stage is the axial coding whereby the researcher identified the relationships amid the themes and finally the selective coding whereby the researcher narrowed down the key themes. It was through this process that the researcher could get out of the individual stories and develop general patterns that would describe the findings of the survey (Stapley *et al.*, 2022).

Thematic analysis was appreciated by the researcher as it offered details and context (Christou, 2022). Although statistical analysis gave quantitative data of prevalence and impacts, thematic analysis brought out human aspect of the numbers. Indicatively, the experience of isolation, anxiety, and resentment of the institutions were pointed out in interviews with victims. Parents have mentioned difficulties in tracking online activities and parenting. Teachers claimed that awareness campaigns in schools were essential, whereas the representatives of the law enforcement agencies indicated the lack of reporting systems and the lack of forces (Butler *et al.*, 2022). These themes added value to the research as they described the reason behind the appearance of some trends in the survey data.

The researcher used a combination of statistical and thematic analysis to develop a holistic meaning. The quantitative results were put into perspective based on qualitative data, whereby the figures were not viewed in isolation (Halevi Hochwald *et al.*, 2023). Indicatively, in case statistical analysis indicated poor awareness of legal remedies, thematic analysis clarified this by showing absence of outreach programs and lack of confidence with the enforcement agencies. When the regression analysis found social media use to

be an indicator of vulnerability, interviews exposed the effects of a peer pressure and online disinhibition as being motivating factors to risky behavior. This combination enhanced the validity of conclusions and gave an overview of the issue.



Figure 3.20: Key Benefits of Thematic Analysis
(Source: Self-created)

The researcher was aware that data analysis was to be done through rigor and systematic processes. The statistical analysis required accurate data cleaning, coding, and entry to be accurate (Hennigar *et al.*, 2022). To eliminate bias, the thematic analysis method demanded the consistency of coding and interpretation. The researcher utilized software tools to control and organize the data effectively to increase its reliability. Qualitative data were anonymized and highly sensitive accounts were treated with sensitivity to avoid violating ethical principles (Namey *et al.*, 2022). These steps were necessary as they made sure the analysis had credible and trustful results.

Finally, the research used statistical analysis to measure prevalence and effects and thematic analysis to identify patterns and meanings of experiences. This two-fold approach gave the researcher the opportunity to be objective and as well as provide profound results. The methodological rigor and contextual relevance of the study were obtained by balancing between quantitative and qualitative analysis to give a comprehensive picture of cyberbullying among youth in Andhra Pradesh and evidence-based suggestions to policy and practice.

3.8 Sampling Technique

A stratified random sampling method was used in the study to make sure that the survey findings were typical of the diverse population of young people in Andhra Pradesh (Petrikova, 2022). The researcher realized that cyberbullying and online harassment differed significantly among demographic groups (age, gender, socioeconomic status, and geographic location). These differences would not have been sufficiently represented in a simple random sample because some of the subgroups would have been underrepresented. Stratified random sampling also enabled the researcher to stratify the population into homogenous stratum and then sample participants at random. This method minimized the variation within groups, improved the accuracy and allowed the proportionate representation of subgroups in the end sample (Obilor, 2023).

The researcher established strata in terms of age, gender, socio-economic status and an urban/rural setting. The age was categorized into two; teenagers aged 15 to 18 years who are enrolled in schools and young adult age group of 19 to 26 years who were undergraduate students or careers just starting their employment. The main reason as to why gender was taken into account is that vulnerability and experiences are different and previous research had indicated that females tended to report more online harassment. The socio-economic background has been added to explain the differences in access to technology, exposure to social media, and knowledge of legal solutions (Yakubiet *et al.*, 2022). The geographic location was split into urban and rural to indicate disparities in the digital infrastructure, cultural norms, and institutional support (Zhang *et al.*, 2025). This organization of the sample based on these strata allowed the researcher to have the entire range of experiences of youth in Andhra Pradesh represented in the survey.

The researcher settled on a sample size of 600 respondents to include in the survey. This value was set as this is the number that would be statistically reliable and yet practical (Akomod, 2025). The sample size of 600 was sufficient to enable making subgroup comparisons and, at the same time, manageable in terms of data collection and analysis. The researcher estimated that the sample would be large enough to bring about

meaningful differences across strata, including differences in prevalence rates or even differences in levels of awareness (Hossan *et al.*, 2023). Inferential statistics, such as correlation and regression analysis, could also be utilized to test hypotheses and determine predictors of vulnerability due to the utilization of the sample size. The researcher took into consideration smaller sample sizes but decided that it would not give the accuracy that is needed in performing subgroup analysis. The bigger sample sizes were considered impractical due to the limitation on resources and due to the logistical issues (Ruzieh *et al.*, 2025). The 600 subjects were selected through a trade-off between the rigor of the methodology and practicality.

In the study, the researcher used the sampling method by initially determining the target group, which was the youth aged 15-26 years old and had access to social media. The population was classified in strata according to the given criteria. The participants in each stratum were selected randomly to represent them proportionally (Stehman and Xing, 2022). As an illustration, assuming that the adolescents in the rural regions constituted 20 percent of the population, then the 20 percent of the sample was selected. This proportionate sampling was to give the sample the reflection of the actual youth distribution in Andhra Pradesh. The sampling was followed by the researcher so as to avoid bias and also so as to be consistent. Questionnaires were to be administered systematically by training the enumerators to adhere to the sampling protocol (Neill *et al.*, 2025). Such steps made the sample more reliable and the results of the findings more valid.

Stratified random sampling was also important to the researcher since it enabled a deep analysis of the subgroups (Huo *et al.*, 2023). The method facilitated a comparison between adolescents and young adults, males and females, urban and rural youths as well as various socioeconomic backgrounds. Such a detailed level was necessary in order to determine which of the demographics were the most vulnerable to cyberbullying and to recommend accordingly (Erliyani, 2022). As an example, in the case when the awareness of legal remedies among the rural adolescents is lower, the study could suggest specific awareness campaigns in the rural schools. In case young adult females indicated an increased prevalence, the

interventions would be targeted on colleges and workplaces. Stratified sampling gave the granularity necessary to make such evidence-based suggestions (Furman, 2023).

The researcher accepted the fact that stratified random sampling was to be planned and implemented. The establishment of strata required the rigorous demographic data and the proportional distribution required the strict calculations. The random sampling in the strata was to be taken care of in a systematic manner to prevent bias (Pribadiet *al.*, 2025). These difficulties were solved by good planning and training. The researcher believed that such efforts were needed since they made sure that the sample was representative, reliable, and in line with objectives of the study.

The research used stratified random sampling to get the variety of the youth in Andhra Pradesh and fixed 600 respondents to balance reliability of statistics with feasibility. The combination enabled the researcher to come up with representative, precise and actionable findings. The sampling method was good enough to make sure that every subgroup was well represented and the sample size provided sufficient power in terms of statistical analysis (Zickar and Keith, 2023). These decisions enhanced the rigor of the study methodology and made sure that the study findings could be used to make effective interventions and policy solutions.

3.9 Research ethics

The research adhered to a strict ethical model in the research process to promote authenticity and credibility and respect to the participants. Since the study was aimed at cyberbullying and online harassment among young people in Andhra Pradesh, the researcher understood the sensibility of the subject, and she took certain ethical precautions to ensure that the participants would not be affected in their rights, dignity, and well-being. The ethics were applied throughout the research process including the sampling and data collection, analysis, and reporting with the objective of ensuring that the research was conducted professionally and provided credible results.

Informed consent was one of the key ethical principles that the researcher put in the first place. Every participant was given an explicit

information regarding the object of the study, the type of his or her involvement, and the purpose of data collecting. Teenagers aged 15-18 and young adults aged 19-26 years, gave parental or guardian consent and subjects, respectively. The researcher clarified that the participation was voluntary and that people could leave at any point of time without any penalty. The process was what made sure that the participants were involved in the process willing to participate and being fully aware of their rights.

The author of the research also focused on confidentiality and anonymity. Since the nature of cyberbullying was about personal experiences, which were sensitive, it was important to safeguard the identities. Anonymization of survey responses was done and no personal information was stored in the data. Transcripts of interviews were coded without the names and personal information to make sure, that the stories would be analyzed without any invasion of privacy. The case studies were recorded under pseudonym and modified information to avoid identification of people. These steps prevented the participants of the research against possible stigma, retaliation, or emotional discomfort that might come with the revelation of their stories.

The researcher was ethically sensitive to the vulnerable groups. Teenagers were viewed as one of the most vulnerable groups of ages because of their reliance on parental advice. Questions designed by the researcher were sensitive not to hurt feelings and the interviews had to be done in conducive environments. In cases when the participants shared stories of extreme harassment or mental pain, the researcher was emphatic and communicated on what support mechanisms were available. This was a responsible method of taking into consideration the emotional aspects of the topic of the research.

The research followed data integrity and authenticity in that all the information obtained was authentic and reflected the experiences of the participants in a real manner. The researcher did not fabricate, falsify or report selectively. Pilot survey instruments were used to ensure that the survey instruments were clear and reliable, eliminating chances of misinterpretation. Transcription of interviews was done in a faithful manner whereas thematic coding was done in an orderly manner to avoid tampering with the

voices of the participants. The case studies were recorded on the basis of proven reports, so that they indicated actual incidences, and not speculation. These measures enhanced the validity of the results and supported the validity of the study.

The researcher adhered to the principles of ethical legal analysis standards by making sure that interpretation of laws and policies were correct and impartial. The information technology act and Indian penal code were reviewed impartially and enforcement issues were reported depending on facts and not subjective opinions. Respectuous interviews were carried out with the law enforcement officials and their opinions were portrayed accurately. This method was also authentic when it comes to the analysis of the legal framework and also this strategy did not misrepresent the institutional practices.

Another ethical aspect in reporting that the researcher upheld was transparency. The results were provided in an honest manner with the strengths and weaknesses of the study. The prevalence rates, the differences between subgroups and their awareness were not exaggerated or distorted. The qualitative themes were displayed using representative quotes to make sure the voices of the participants are authentic. The evidence-based recommendations were based on evidence and not speculations, and integrity in the translation of findings into policy recommendations was upheld. This openness increased the credibility of the study and it was able to guarantee confidence in its findings by the stakeholders.

The researcher also applied ethical protection of data storage and management. The data of surveys, interviews and case study was stored in a secure manner and only the authorized personnel could access them. Encryption was applied to digital files and locked physical storage was used to store physical documents. The measures avoided the illegal access and the confidentiality of sensitive information. Information was stored only as long as it was required to complete the study after which it was disposed in a responsible manner.

Cultural and social sensitivities were also observed in the study. Andhra Pradesh was a multicultural and heterogeneous population with

different socio-economic and cultural backgrounds. The researcher ensured that research instruments were culturally relevant and accessible to both the rural and urban young people. The words were selected to prevent bias and misconception. Interviews were also done in a setting where the participants felt free and cultural norms were observed during the process. This sensitivity increased authenticity because the findings were made to be an actuality of the participants without manipulation.

The researcher recognized the moral accountability in the propagation. Results were distributed to academic, policy and community stakeholders in a way that upheld the confidentiality and dignity of the participants. Reports were not sensational and dwelt on positive recommendations. The researcher also focused on responsible online practices, digital citizenship and legal awareness, such that the dissemination would be a positive contribution towards tackling cyber bullying. This ethical obligation strengthened the credibility of the study since the results were in accordance with the social advantage.

Finally, in the study, research ethics were observed since it ensured informed consent, confidentiality, sensitivity to vulnerable populations, integrity of data, transparency, safe data management, cultural sensitivity, and responsible publication. Fidelity was maintained through faithful representation of the experiences of the participants, no fabrication and distortion of information and basing the findings on evidence. These ethical standards provided the study with credible, trustworthy, as well as socially responsible findings about cyber bullying amongst youth in Andhra Pradesh.

3.10 Summary

This is the chapter where the methodology was introduced to examine the issue of cyberbullying and online harassment amongst young people in Andhra Pradesh. It has started by describing the deductive methodology of research and thus enabled the study to compare the hypothesis based on the current theories with the empirical data. This philosophy was in turn justified positivist, with the importance of objectivity, quantification and generalizability being critical to generalizing the results in a reliable manner. The chapter described the application of the primary

research methods, namely, surveys, interviews, case study, and legal analysis as the instruments of producing original data. The main quantitative design was chosen to address prevalence, impacts and awareness with the aid of stratified random sampling to be representative with respect to age, gender, socio-economic, and geographic subgroups. Data gathering was an integrated approach of quantitative evidence with the use of statistical methods, and a focus on thematic coding to unravel qualitative data with the help of structured questionnaires and qualitative

interviews and case documentation. Ethical issues were highlighted, such as informed consent, confidentiality, sensitivity to vulnerable populations, and truthfulness in reporting. Inclusion and exclusion criteria were established to target the youth that had valuable social media exposure and the sample of 600 individuals was statistically reliable. These factors made sure methodological rigor, contextual relevance, and ethical responsibility, and gave a good base to plausible findings and recommendations to take.

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