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The Relationship Between Cyberbullying–Cybervictimization Experiences and Psychological Distress Symptoms Among Iranian Adolescents: The Mediating Role of School Climate

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A B S T R A C T

Objective: The present study examined the association between cyberbullying–cybervictimization and psychological distress among Iranian adolescents with particular attention to the mediating role of school climate.

Methods and Materials: This Correlation study was conducted in 2025 among high school students in the Kurdistan province of Iran. A total of 1384 participants (638 girls, 746 boys; mean age = 14.7 years) completed the School Climate and School Identification Questionnaire (SCASIM-St), along with measures of psychopathology (DASS-21), and Cyberbullying–Cybervictimization Experience Questionnaire (CBVEQ).

Findings: The results indicated that cyberbullying–cybervictimization positively predicted adolescents' psychological distress symptoms. Furthermore, school climate partially mediated the relationship between cyberbullying–cybervictimization and psychological distress. These findings suggest that a positive school climate may buffers adolescents against the adverse mental health consequences of cyberbullying and cybervictimization.

Conclusion: Therefore, fostering a supportive and positive school climate should be considered a key protective factor in reducing cyberbullying–cybervictimization experiences and mitigating their negative impact on adolescent mental health.

Keywords: *School Climate - Cyberbullying–Cybervictimization Experiences - Adolescents*

1. Introduction

Access to the Internet has become increasingly easy and widespread today. Social networks with diverse capabilities, such as platforms for interactions, are increasing every year.(Ziari & Charkari, 2026). Despite these advantages, social media also entail risks, including cyberbullying and cybervictimization (Kee et al., 2022).

Traditional bullying typically occurs face to face and involves relational, verbal, and physical forms of aggression within direct interpersonal interactions (Smith & Slonje, 2010). Cyberbullying represents an extension of these behaviors into online environments, and is enacted through electronic communication (e.g., email, instant or text messages, social-media posts), either synchronously or asynchronously (Slonje & Smith, 2008). Cyberbullying is defined as intentional, repeated, and aggressive behavior aimed at harming another person through electronic contact over time (Hinduja & Patchin, 2008). Similarly, cybervictimization involves repetition, intent, and power imbalance between those involved, but occurs within virtual contexts (Holfeld & Baitz, 2020).

Reported prevalence rates of cyberbullying and cybervictimization vary widely across studies. A meta-analysis by Kowalski et al. (2014) estimated cybervictimization prevalence to range from approximately 10% to 40% A more recent review by Aboujaoude et al. (2015) reported prevalence rates between 20% and 40% .In Iran, one study found that 11.4% of boys and 1.1% of girls reported experiences of cybervictimization (Azami & Taremian, 2020). Regarding traditional bullying, prevalence rates in Iran been reported as 17.4% for bullying perpetration and 25.8% for victimization (Mohseny et al., 2019).

Research examining gender differences in cyberbullying has produced mixed findings. Some studies suggest that girls are more likely than boys to experience cyberbullying both as victims and perpetrators (Uddin & Rahman, 2022). Other research indicates that girls and boys report online harassment at similar rates (Hinduja & Patchin, 2012), whereas some scholars have found higher rates of cyberbullying perpetration among boys (Li, 2006). Likewise, within Iran's traditional bullying context, gender differences have been observed, with boys show higher exposure to bullying and are also more likely to become victims (Mohseny et al., 2019).

New technologies may increase the risk of cyberbullying victimization and have been associated with lower self-esteem and higher psychological distress (Cénat et al., 2014). Psychological distress refers to a general state of psychopathology characterized by symptoms of depression, anxiety, and perceived stress (Ohayashi & Yamada, 2012). A longitudinal study among adolescents has shown interrelationships between depressive symptoms, psychological distress, suicidal ideation, and experiences of being a victim of bullying (Le et al., 2019). The Global Burden of Disease (GBD) project identifies bullying victimization during childhood and adolescence as a risk factor for major depressive disorder and anxiety disorders (Jadambaa et al., 2019).

The social support deterioration model posits that experiencing a major stressor or trauma can reduce perceived social support, which in turn negatively affects emotional and psychological well-being (Chen & Wei, 2013; Erdinc Duru & Murat Balkis, 2018). This model has been applied to explain mental-health problems among adolescents exposed to offline (face-to-face) bullying (Chen & Wei, 2013; Erdinc Duru & Murat Balkis, 2018) and online bullying (Chen, 2020). However, Iranian studies have not sufficiently examined the role of social supports—especially school-based support—in adolescents' mental health in the context of traditional and cyberbullying. Therefore, the present research investigates school climate as a mediator between cyberbullying–cybervictimization experiences and psychological distress among Iranian adolescents.

The substantial psychosocial harm caused by bullying in schools creates major challenges for adolescent mental-health promotion programs and services (Smith & Slonje, 2010). One of the most effective approaches for reducing bullying and victimization in school settings is cultivating a positive school climate (Chen et al., 2020; Yang et al., 2018), particularly since students spend a large portion of their time at school. For example, peer support and positive relationships with school adults serve as strong protective factors against bullying victimization among students in grades 3–12 (Gage et al., 2014).

School climate is defined as a school's unique culture, shaped by multidirectional relationships among members of the school community. Prior studies indicate that a positive school climate can both protect against negative influences and promote academic performance and healthy adolescent development (Thapa et al., 2013). The presence, severity, and nature of adjustment problems among bullying victims vary depending on student characteristics, classroom context, and school climate (Yang et al., 2018). Adolescents reporting cybervictimization tend to experience poorer school climates (Holfeld & Baitz, 2020) and are more likely

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to report elevated psychological distress. Thus, school climate may play a protective role in the relationship between cybervictimization and distress. Indeed, a moderating effect of school support (including school climate, teacher support, and school attachment) has been found for the relationship between traditional victimization and mental-health problems (Stadler et al., 2010).

Research has examined the mediating or moderating role of school climate in multiple associations: traditional victimization and depressive symptoms (Clark et al., 2022), cybervictimization and internalizing symptoms (Holfeld & Baitz, 2020), traditional bully-victim experiences and elementary students' engagement (Yang et al., 2018) and suicidal ideation (Cao et al., 2022), and cyberbullying–cybervictimization and adolescent school engagement (Yang et al., 2020). Findings consistently show that cybervictimization has a direct association with psychological distress (Chen, 2020), and that cyberbullying–cybervictimization is significantly and positively related to psychological distress (Cénat et al., 2014; Schneider et al., 2012; Shaheen et al., 2023). In Kowalski et al. (2014) meta-analysis, school-related factors inversely associated with cyberbullying involvement included positive school climate and school safety (Kowalski et al., 2014). Greater school connectedness is also linked to lower risk of both traditional and cyber victimization (Biswas et al., 2022), whereas negative school climate contributes to increased cyberbullying (Triantoro & Suyono, 2020).

Peers, family, and school represent key social contexts influencing the intensity of adolescents' cybervictimization experiences (Holfeld & Baitz, 2020). Because cyberbullying–cybervictimization increases the risk of anxiety and depression (Kee et al., 2024), meaningful reductions in bullying prevalence may help alleviate the mental-health burden associated with psychological disorders. Positive school-climate experiences include fairness and justice toward students, trust and respect toward teachers and staff, opportunities for success in a safe environment, and positive interpersonal relationships among students and between students and teachers (Espelage et al., 2014). These factors highlight the importance of school functioning and connectedness (Biswas et al., 2022). Given the centrality of school climate in early adolescence, it is crucial to examine how this context influences adolescents' capacity to cope with cybervictimization (Holfeld & Baitz, 2020).

Therefore, the present study investigates the mediating role of school climate in the relationship between cyberbullying–cybervictimization experiences and psychological distress, and examines gender differences in cyberbullying–cybervictimization among Iranian adolescents.

Based on the importance of school climate and guided by the social support deterioration model in the context of cyberbullying–cybervictimization as a stressor, we developed a mediation model comprising three main hypotheses:

(1) cyberbullying–cybervictimization is positively related to psychological distress.

(2) cyberbullying–cybervictimization is negatively related to school climate.

(3) school climate is negatively related to psychological distress and mediates the effect of cyberbullying–cybervictimization on psychological distress.

2. Methods and Materials

2.1. Study Design and Participants

Data were drawn from a university research project conducted in Kurdistan Province, Iran, during the 2024–2025 academic year. A multistage cluster random sampling procedure was used. A multi-stage cluster random sampling method was used. First, five counties were randomly selected from a list of 10 counties in the province, and then 50 middle and high schools were selected by simple random sampling from a list provided by the Department of Education. Questionnaires were distributed online through the SHAD platform (National Student Educational Network), which was accessible to most students. The sampling was conducted during the month of May 2025. A total of 4390 students viewed the questionnaires. 1384 students (mean age = 14.7, standard deviation = 1.54, age range = 12-19) submitted their complete responses. All ethical guidelines for the research were followed. Before data collection, informed consent was obtained from all participants (its details were included at the beginning of the questionnaires).

2.2. Measures

Demographic Information: Participants reported gender, grade level, age, GPA, parents' education level, and average daily hours of Internet use.

Depression, Anxiety, and Stress Scale (DASS-21): The DASS-21 was developed by Lovibond and Lovibond (1995) (Lovibond & Lovibond, 1995). It consists of three self-report

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subscales assessing negative affective states: depression, anxiety, and stress. Each subscale includes seven items, and subscale scores are obtained by summing relevant item scores. Items are rated on a 4-point scale from 0 ("Did not apply to me at all") to 3 ("Applied to me very much"). In one study, Cronbach's alpha coefficients for stress, depression, and anxiety were .97, .92, and .95, respectively (Antony et al., 1998). The scale's validity and reliability in Iran were confirmed by Aazami et al. (2017), who reported Cronbach's alpha values of .77 (depression), .73 (anxiety), and .78 (stress). In the current study, Cronbach's alpha coefficients were .86, .83, and .84 for depression, anxiety, and stress, respectively.

Cyberbullying–Cybervictimization Experience Questionnaire (CBVEQ): The CBVEQ was developed and validated by Antoniadou et al. (2016) (Antoniadou & Markos, 2016) to assess cyberbullying and cybervictimization among adolescents. Items are rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = never, 2 = once or twice, 3 = sometimes, 4 = most of the time, 5 = every day). The scale has two 12-item factors: cybervictimization and cyberbullying, each measuring direct and indirect forms. In Iran, Basharpoor and Zardi (2019) confirmed the questionnaire's psychometric properties. In the present study, Cronbach's alpha coefficients were .88 (cyberbullying) and .83 (cybervictimization).

School Climate and School Identification Questionnaire (SCASIM-St): The SCASIM-St was developed by Lee et al. (2017). It includes 38 items across five components: student–student relations, student-staff relations, academic emphasis, shared values and approaches between staff and students, and school identification. Items are rated on a 6-point Likert scale from 1 ("strongly disagree") to 6 ("strongly agree"). Psychometric evaluation in Iranian adolescents yielded Cronbach's alphas ranging from .78 to .92, with test–retest reliability of .73 ($p < .001$) (Imamgholivand et al., 2019). In this study, Cronbach's alpha values for student–student relations, staff–student relations, academic emphasis, shared values/approach, and school identification were .88, .94, .77, .90, and .93, respectively.

2.3. Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using structural equation modeling (SEM) in Amos 24.0 with maximum likelihood estimation. Model fit was evaluated using χ^2/df, Comparative Fit Index (CFI), Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA), and Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR). Model fit was considered adequate if χ^2/df was between 1 and 5 and the following criteria were met: RMSEA < 0.05, CFI > 0.90, and SRMR < 0.08 (Hooper et al., 2007).

3. Findings and Results

Of the 1,384 respondents, 638 (46%) were girls and 746 (53.9%) were boys. A total of 1,006 students (73%) were in middle school and 378 (27%) in high school. The mean age was 14.7 years. Regarding parents' education, 80.6% of fathers and 89.7% of mothers held a diploma or below. Mean GPA was 17.59 (out of 20). Average daily Internet use was 3.48 hours. Means and standard deviations for study variables are presented in Table 1.

Because all questionnaire items were mandatory (as stated in the informed-consent section), there were no missing data. Spearman correlations indicated that psychological distress dimensions (depression, anxiety, stress) were negatively correlated with school-climate dimensions (student–student relations, staff–student relations, academic emphasis, shared values/approach) and positively correlated with cyberbullying–cybervictimization dimensions (cyberbullying and cybervictimization) ($p < .01$). School-climate dimensions were also negatively correlated with cyberbullying–cybervictimization ($p < .01$).

Table 1

Pearson's correlation coefficients between key variables.

Variable	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1.Student-Student Rel	27.13	7.84	1							
2.Student-Staff Rel	38.55	11.52	.49**	1						
3.Academic Emphasis	36.10	8.59	.47**	.70**	1					
4.Shared Val & Appr	33.32	9.18	.59**	.75**	.72**	1				
5.Anxiety	4.57	4.45	-.19**	-.19**	-.13**	-.22**	1			
6.Depression	5.77	5.77	-.23**	-.27**	-.19**	-.30**	.71**	1		
7.Stress	6.06	6.06	-.23**	-.24**	-.16**	-.28**	.76**	.79**	1	
8.Cyber-bullying	13.47	13.47	-.12**	-.16**	-.17**	-.15**	.20**	.20**	.20**	1
9.Cyber-victimization	15.55	15.55	-.19**	-.19**	-.17**	-.20**	.33**	.32**	.32**	.57**

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The measurement model showed good fit to the data (Figure 1): $\chi^2/df = 4.00$, CFI = 0.98, RMSEA = 0.04, SRMR = 0.02. All factor loadings were significant at p < .001, indicating adequate measurement of latent variables (see Table 2).

Table 2

Fit Indices of Structure Model

Model	df	X^2	x^2/ df	TLI	IFI	AGFI	GFI	CFI	RMSEA	SRMR
	24	96.145	4.00	.98	.97	.97	.98	.98	.04	.02

Note X^2= chi-square; df = degrees of freedom; CFI = comparative fit index; RMSEA = root mean square error of approximation; AGFI= Adjusted goodness of fit index; GFI= Goodness of fit index; TLI= Tucker-Lewis index; SRMR= Standardized Root Mean Square Residual; IFI= Incremental Fit Index.

Table 3 shows Factor loadings and regression weights for the measurement model. The standardized coefficients of Cyber-Bullying/ Victimization on School Climate negative and on psychological distress is positive. In addition, School Climate has a negative effect on psychological distress (p<0.001). All factor loadings are also significant (p<0.001). Also, the mediating effect of School Climate between Cyber-Bullying/ Victimization and psychological distress is confirmed and significant (p<0.001).

Figure 1

Standardized results of School Climate mediating the association between Cyber-Bullying/ Victimization and psychological distress.

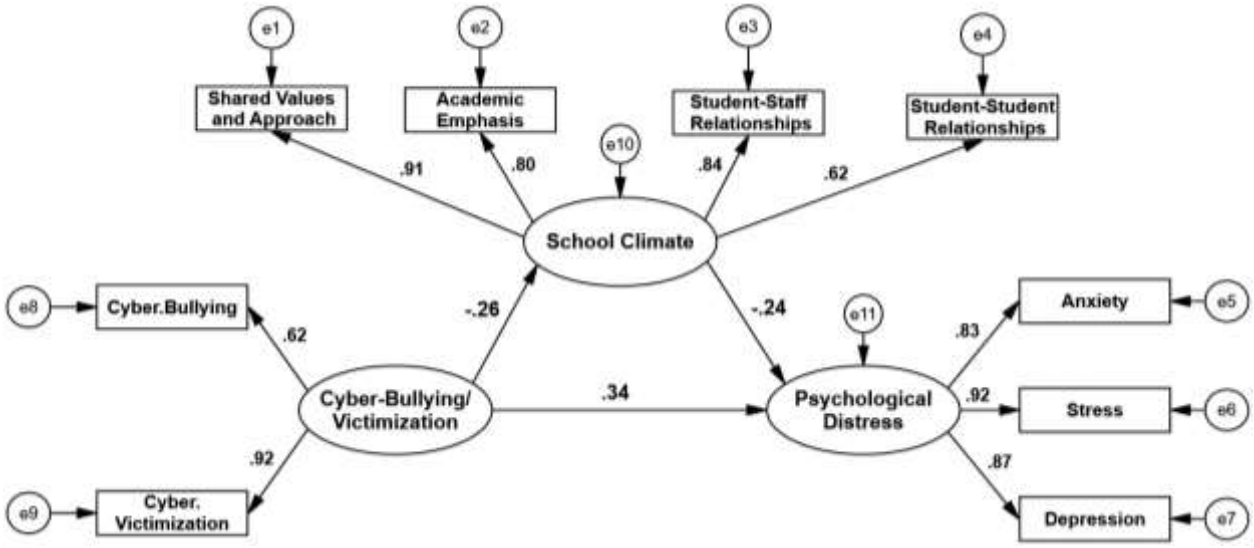


Table 3

Factor loadings and regression weights for the measurement model

	D. Effects	S. D. Effects	S.E.	C.R.	p
School Climate <- Cyber-Bullying/ Victimization	-.505	-.259	.069	-7.307	***
Psychological Distress <- School Climate	-.129	-.237	.016	-8.158	***
Psychological Distress <- Cyber-Bullying/ Victimization	.355	.336	.042	8.532	***
Shared Values and Approach <- School Climate	1.000	.905			
Student-Student Relationships <- School Climate	.590	.625	.023	25.744	***
Anxiety <- Psychological Distress	.816	.827	.020	40.501	***
Stress <- Psychological Distress	1.000	.916			
Depression <- Psychological Distress	1.028	.872	.023	43.866	***
Cyber.Victimization <- Cyber-Bullying/ Victimization	1.000	.923			***
Cyber.Bullying <- Cyber-Bullying/ Victimization	.535	.618	.047	11.263	***
Academic Emphasis <- School Climate	.832	.804	.022	37.310	***
Student-Staff Relationships <- School Climate	1.168	.843	.029	40.004	***

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To test indirect effects (see Figure 1): cyberbullying–cybervictimization → school climate → psychological distress), 1,000 bootstrap samples were used to estimate effect sizes and 95% confidence intervals (CI). As shown in Table 4, the indirect path from cyberbullying–cybervictimization to psychological distress was significant (R^2 = .065, 95% CI [.048, .091], p < .001). Given the significant direct effect (R^2 = .355, 95% CI [.275, .442], p < .001), the indirect effect accounted for 15.5% of the total effect (R^2 = .420, p < .001). Consistent with the hypotheses, school climate partially mediated the association between cyberbullying–cybervictimization and psychological distress.

Table 4

Standardized direct, indirect, and total effects for the mediation model.

		95% CI		
Model pathway	**Effect size**	**Lower**	**Upper**	**p**
Indirect effect				
Cyber-Bullying/ Victimization → School Climate → Psychological Distress	.065	.048	.091	.001
Direct effect				
Cyber-Bullying/ Victimization → Psychological Distress	.355	.275	.442	.002
Total effects	.420	.334	.515	.002

Independent-samples t tests comparing boys and girls on cybervictimization and cyberbullying indicated a significant gender difference for cybervictimization: girls (M = 15.12, SD = 4.3) vs. boys (M = 15.91, SD = 4.8), t(1380.4) = −3.21, p < .01 (two-tailed). A significant gender difference was also found for cyberbullying: girls (M = 12.90, SD = 2.4) vs. boys (M = 13.97, SD = 4.4), t(1202.7) = −5.63, p < .01 (two-tailed). (see Table 5)

Table 5

Independent-samples t tests for gender

95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		t-test for Equality of Means					Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		Independent Samples t Test
Upper	Lower	Std. Error Difference	Mean Difference	Sig.	df	t	Sig.	F	
-.309	-1.2755	.246	-.792	.001	1380.4	-3.21	<.0001	12.46	cybervictimization
-.696	-1.4391	.189	-1.06	.001	1202.7	-5.63	<.0001	63.30	cyberbullying

4. Discussion

The primary aim of this study was to examine the relationship between cyberbullying–cybervictimization experiences and psychological distress, and to test the mediating role of school climate in Iranian adolescents. Results showed that cyberbullying–cybervictimization was positively associated with psychological distress and negatively associated with school climate. Moreover, school climate partially mediated the relationship between cyberbullying–cybervictimization and psychological distress.

Our findings indicated a positive association between cyberbullying–cybervictimization and psychological distress, consistent with prior studies (Cénat et al., 2014; Chen, 2020; Schneider et al., 2012; Shaheen et al., 2023). As expected, cybervictimization contributed to higher levels of depression and anxiety symptoms (McComas & Gil-Rivas, 2024; Rahman et al., 2023). One study found that cybervictimization doubled adolescents' likelihood of experiencing depression, anxiety, and stress (Lee et al., 2023). additionally, two meta-analyses reported moderate effect sizes for the association between cybervictimization and depression/anxiety (Molero Jurado et al., 2022; Yuchang et al., 2017).

A plausible explanation is that exposure to cyberbullying may increase feelings of sadness and hopelessness. Adolescents who experience cyberbullying are more likely to internalize these experiences, which may intensify depressive symptoms (McField et al., 2023). Cyberbullying–cybervictimization can also reduce self-esteem, thereby contributing to elevated psychological distress.

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All proposed paths in the mediation model were significant. First, cyberbullying–cybervictimization was significantly and negatively related to school climate, consistent with previous research (Hinduja & Patchin, 2012; Li et al., 2022; Triantoro & Suyono, 2020). Given that family and school climates are strong predictors of victimization via mobile phones and the Internet, these results highlight the protective roles of family and school contexts against online violence (Ortega-Barón et al., 2016). Although cyberbullying does not necessarily occur within the school setting—since adolescents often access the Internet at home or elsewhere (Festl, 2016)—school factors still matter. In particular, a positive school environment appears important for coping with online victimization (Veiga Simão et al., 2017).

This suggests that schools characterized by supportive, safe, and relationally warm climates can meaningfully reduce adolescents' risk of cybervictimization. The authors interpret this as evidence that school climate functions as a key protective factor—buffering the negative psychological effects of cyberbullying–cybervictimization. Even when cyberbullying occurs outside school, strengthened school relationships and a secure educational environment can moderate the impact of online violence.

Second, school climate was significantly and negatively related to psychological distress, consistent with prior studies (Holfeld & Baitz, 2020; Wang, 2022). This finding underscores the importance of supportive and safe environments at school and home for healthy development during early adolescence. Nevertheless, for adolescents who experience repeated cybervictimization, general improvements in school climate may be insufficient, highlighting the need for more targeted and specialized interventions (Holfeld & Baitz, 2020). Still, evidence supports the inhibitory and protective role of a positive school climate against negative emotions and problem behaviors (Schultze-Krumbholz et al., 2020).

Third, school climate partially mediated the association between cyberbullying–cybervictimization and distress. Previous studies have documented mediating or moderating effects of school climate in relationships between traditional victimization and depression (Clark et al., 2022), as well as between cybervictimization and internalizing symptoms (Holfeld & Baitz, 2020). School climate encompasses broad aspects of school experience, including teaching and learning quality, social relationships, structural features, and shared beliefs, values, and norms (Schultze-Krumbholz et al., 2020). Students involved in bullying as perpetrators, victims, or both report more negative perceptions of school climate (Nickerson et al., 2014), and adolescents' perceptions of climate help explain the link between victimization experiences and depressive symptoms (Clark et al., 2022).

Given the conceptual alignment between the present mediation model and the social support deterioration framework, our findings can be interpreted through this theoretical lens. The social support deterioration model posits that bullying represents a major stressor that reduced perceived social support, thereby undermining emotional and psychological well-being (Chen & Wei, 2011; E. Duru & M. Balkis, 2018). This framework has been used to explain distress among adolescents exposed to traditional bullying (Chen & Wei, 2011; E. Duru & M. Balkis, 2018) and likely applies to cyber contexts as well (Chen, 2020). Cybervictimization may lead adolescents to perceive their schools as unsafe; as victimized youth often hold more negative views of school climate (Nickerson et al., 2014). Increased isolation and reduced perceived support may lower help-seeking, which in turn increases distress (Leadbeater et al., 2015). Positive school-climate experiences may thus serve a protective function akin to social support. For instance, higher school connectedness (e.g., supportive teacher and peer relations, belongingness) reduces the association between cybervictimization and suicidal behavior (Kim et al., 2018).

These findings suggest that schools can play a vital role in preventing cyberbullying by implementing preventive policies, investing in digital and media literacy, and cultivating safe, and supportive environments (Martins et al., 2018). Conversely, unsafe and unsupportive school environments may reduce adolescents' willingness to seek help when experiencing stress and may intensify social withdrawal, particularly among cybervictimized youth (Holfeld & Baitz, 2020).

Finally, significant gender differences were found with boys reporting higher levels of both cybervictimization and cyberbullying than girls. These findings are consistent with some previous studies (Barlett & Coyne, 2014; E. Duru & M. Balkis, 2018; Mohseny et al., 2019; Nickerson et al., 2014; Sun et al., 2016) that have shown this experience to be higher in boys, and at odds with others (Biswas et al., 2022; Smith et al., 2018) that have reported the amount of this experience to be higher in girls.

Some research has found girls to experience more cybervictimization, whereas boys report higher cyberaggression (Moreno Ruiz et al., 2019). Such gender

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differences are often attributed to differential gender socialization and normative expectations about male and female behavior (Felix & Green, 2009), although they may also vary by bullying type, age, culture, historical period, and measurement approaches (Biswas et al., 2022; Smith et al., 2018).

5. Conclusion

The rapid proliferation of internet access has fundamentally reshaped the developmental landscape for contemporary adolescents. While social networking sites have become ubiquitous tools for peer communication, this digital integration remains double-edged, introducing pervasive risks such as cyberbullying and online victimization. Adolescents, who are at a critical developmental juncture, are particularly susceptible to these threats, which are inextricably linked to diminished self-esteem and heightened psychological distress, manifesting as anxiety, depression, and chronic stress. Given these challenges, cultivating a positive and supportive "school climate" has emerged as a crucial protective factor. A healthy school climate is defined not merely as the absence of conflict, but as a complex configuration of emotional, social, and pedagogical dimensions that fundamentally shape students' lived experiences. Empirical evidence consistently demonstrates that schools characterized by high levels of perceived safety, belonging, and institutional support significantly attenuate the prevalence of high-risk behaviors, including cyber-victimization. Conversely, educational environments marked by excessive competition, institutional indifference, or a lack of robust oversight inadvertently create a fertile ground for the escalation of these cyber-related harms.

The present study rigorously examines the mediating role of a supportive school climate in the relationship between cyberbullying experiences and subsequent psychological distress, while simultaneously highlighting the nuances of gender-based disparities among Iranian adolescents. Our findings indicate that the educational environment acts as a pivotal buffer, significantly mitigating the psychological impact of cyber-victimization. By serving as a mediator, a supportive school climate effectively alleviates the levels of distress that stem from online conflicts. Therefore, the intentional cultivation of a positive school atmosphere is not merely an educational objective; it is a vital mental health intervention. It fosters healthier interpersonal relationships and serves as a powerful mechanism against the deleterious effects of the virtual world. Notably, the study reveals significant gender differences, with findings suggesting that male adolescents may be particularly vulnerable to these risks. This underscores an urgent requirement for tailored, gender-sensitive preventive interventions and proactive policy frameworks to effectively manage and control these behaviors within educational settings.

6. Limitations & Suggestions

Several limitations should be noted. The cross-sectional design and reliance on retrospective self-report limited our ability to test temporal/causal relationships within the proposed model. Longitudinal studies are necessary to clarify the time-ordered links between cyberbullying–cybervictimization and psychological distress. Findings may not generalize beyond the sampled population. Lastly, although participation was confidential, but some teens may be more hesitant to report their cyber victimization experiences or symptoms of distress due to fear of possible consequences and are more inclined to present themselves in a better light. Another limitation of the research is that not all students had access to the SHAD platform, from which the data was collected.

Given the central role of school climate in the model, educational programs should be designed and evaluated within primary youth information contexts such as schools... Additionally, examining cultural norms and gender expectations through multicultural methodologies may provide deeper insights into gendered patterns of cyberbullying. Finally, testing targeted interventions—such as safe-school climate enhancement programs or specialized psychological supports for repeatedly victimized adolescents—appears essential for developing practical solutions.

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Declaration of Interest

The authors of this article declared no conflict of interest.

Ethical Considerations

The study protocol adhered to the principles outlined in the Helsinki Declaration, which provides guidelines for ethical research involving human participants.

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Transparency of Data

In accordance with the principles of transparency and open research, we declare that all data and materials used in this study are available upon request.

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Authors' Contributions

All authors equally contributed to this article.

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