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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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1. Round 1

1.1. Reviewer 1

Reviewer:

In the Introduction paragraph beginning “Reported prevalence rates of cyberbullying and cybervictimization vary widely across studies,” the prevalence figures are presented without sufficient methodological qualification. The authors compare cybervictimization, cyberbullying, and traditional bullying estimates from different studies, countries, instruments, age groups, and reference periods. These figures are not necessarily directly comparable. The paragraph should explain why prevalence estimates differ across studies and should more clearly distinguish perpetration from victimization and cyberbullying from traditional bullying.

In the paragraph stating “The social support deterioration model posits that experiencing a major stressor or trauma can reduce perceived social support,” the theoretical connection between this framework and the operationalized mediator requires stronger justification. The study measures school climate, which is a broader construct than perceived social support and includes academic emphasis, shared values, relationships, and school identification. The authors should explain more precisely

how school climate functions within the social support deterioration model and which components of school climate are theoretically expected to deteriorate following cyberbullying or cybervictimization.

In the measurement section, the manuscript relies almost exclusively on Cronbach's alpha to establish reliability. Given that the study uses latent-variable SEM, a more comprehensive assessment of the measurement model is warranted. The authors should report standardized factor loadings, composite reliability, average variance extracted, and evidence of convergent and discriminant validity. This is particularly important because several school-climate dimensions appear strongly correlated, raising questions about their empirical distinctiveness.

Authors uploaded the revised manuscript.

1.2. Reviewer 2

Reviewer:

In the paragraph stating that "school climate may play a protective role in the relationship between cybervictimization and distress," the manuscript moves between mediation and moderation terminology without adequate distinction. Some cited studies examine moderation, whereas the present study tests mediation. These are different statistical and theoretical mechanisms. The Introduction should clearly separate evidence supporting mediation from evidence supporting moderation and should explain why the authors selected a mediation model as the primary analytical framework.

In the hypothesis section, the statement "cyberbullying–cybervictimization is positively related to psychological distress" raises an important conceptual issue because cyberbullying perpetration and cybervictimization are distinct constructs. The questionnaire itself includes separate factors for cyberbullying and cybervictimization, yet the structural model combines them into one latent construct. The authors should provide a clear theoretical and psychometric justification for this decision. It would also be informative to test cyberbullying and cybervictimization separately because their relationships with distress and school climate may differ considerably.

In the Participants and Study Design section, the consecutive sentences "A multistage cluster random sampling procedure was used. A multi-stage cluster random sampling method was used" are redundant and should be corrected. More importantly, because students were sampled within 50 schools, the observations are clustered rather than fully independent. The authors should assess whether school-level clustering meaningfully affected the data by reporting intraclass correlations or design effects. If clustering is substantial, standard SEM without adjustment may underestimate standard errors.

In the sampling paragraph, the statement "A total of 4390 students viewed the questionnaires. 1384 students submitted their complete responses" deserves further methodological attention. This represents a relatively modest completion proportion and raises the possibility of nonresponse or self-selection bias. The authors should define what "viewed" means, report the participation or completion rate explicitly, and discuss whether respondents could systematically differ from nonrespondents in terms of school engagement, Internet access, psychological distress, or cybervictimization experiences.

In the sentence "Before data collection, informed consent was obtained from all participants," the ethical procedure is insufficiently described considering that participants were between 12 and 19 years of age. The manuscript should specify whether parental or guardian consent and adolescent assent were obtained for minors, whether any waiver was approved, and how confidentiality was maintained on the online educational platform. The authors should also indicate whether any referral or support procedure was available for students reporting severe distress or harmful cybervictimization experiences.

In the Data Analysis section, the sentence "Data were analyzed using structural equation modeling (SEM) in Amos 24.0 with maximum likelihood estimation" should be supplemented with additional diagnostic information. Maximum likelihood estimation assumes several distributional conditions that may be problematic for cyberbullying variables, which frequently show skewness and floor effects. The authors should report procedures for assessing normality, outliers, multicollinearity, linearity, and influential observations and should explain whether any robust estimation or bootstrap procedures were used to address violations.

In the SCASIM-St description, the authors state that the questionnaire contains five components, including school identification, but the structural model appears to include only four school-climate indicators. School identification is not shown

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in the model and no explanation is provided for its omission. The authors should clarify whether this dimension was deliberately excluded and, if so, explain whether the decision was theoretical, psychometric, or based on model fit. Such modifications should be reported transparently.

Authors uploaded the revised manuscript.

2. Revised

Editor's decision after revisions: Accepted.
Editor in Chief's decision: Accepted.

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