

A systematic review of cyberbullying at work: pathways, conceptual framework, consequences, HR practices and new horizons


Uma revisão sistemática sobre o *cyberbullying* no trabalho: itinerários, estrutura conceitual, consequências, práticas de RH e novos horizontes

Una revisión sistemática del ciberbullying en el trabajo: itinerarios, marco conceptual, consecuencias, prácticas de RH y nuevos horizontes

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Abstract: *Cyberbullying is an intentional and aggressive behavior that occurs through digital means, from one person to another, and is also considered an extension of bullying. Current literature lacks studies that systematize the available knowledge on this topic, aiming to understand the field, identify gaps and direct future research. Therefore, the objective of the study is to characterize the conceptual structure of cyberbullying in the workplace, identifying its individual and organizational consequences. Through a systematic review of the literature carried out in the Web of Science and Scopus databases, without temporal delimitation, a total of 15 articles were included in the sample. The data were analyzed with the Bibliometrix package, identifying a research period from 2013 to 2024. The conceptual structure of the field is divided into three axes: cyberbullying experiences; the relationship of cyberbullying with emotions, creativity and intentions to remain in the organization; and influencing variables. Its individual consequences include mental stress, dissatisfaction and negative psychological, physiological and psychosomatic effects. For organizations, high turnover, decreased performance, productivity and commitment stand out. Human resources practices to mitigate the problem were identified, such as workplace safety and psychological support. In addition, the results allowed us to outline an agenda for future studies based on the gaps found. It is hoped that this research will contribute to managers, organizations, workers and society in general to learn about cyberbullying and understand its negative effects on work and personal life.*

Keywords: *Cyberbullying at Work. Systematic Review. HR practices.*

Resumo: O *cyberbullying* é um comportamento intencional e agressivo que ocorre por meios digitais, de uma pessoa para outra, sendo também considerado uma extensão do *bullying*. A literatura atual carece de estudos que sistematizem o conhecimento disponível sobre esse tema, visando compreender o campo, identificar lacunas e direcionar pesquisas futuras. Com isso, o objetivo do estudo é caracterizar a estrutura conceitual do *cyberbullying* no trabalho, identificando suas consequências individuais e organizacionais. Por meio de uma revisão sistemática da literatura realizada nas bases *Web of Science* e *Scopus*, sem delimitação temporal, totalizou-se 15 artigos que compõem a amostra. Os dados foram analisados com o pacote *Bibliometrix*, identificando um período de pesquisas de 2013 a 2024. A estrutura conceitual do campo divide-se em três eixos: experiências de *cyberbullying*; relação do *cyberbullying* com emoções, criatividade e intenções de permanecer na organização; e variáveis influenciadoras. Suas consequências individuais incluem tensão mental, insatisfação e efeitos negativos psicológicos, fisiológicos e psicossomáticos. Para as organizações, destacam-se alta rotatividade, queda no desempenho, produtividade e comprometimento. Identificaram-se práticas de recursos humanos para mitigar o problema, como segurança no trabalho e apoio psicológico. Além disso, os resultados permitiram delinear uma agenda de estudos futuros com base nas lacunas encontradas. Espera-se que esta pesquisa contribua para que gestores, organizações, trabalhadores e a sociedade em geral conheçam o *cyberbullying* e compreendam seus efeitos negativos no trabalho e na vida pessoal.

Palavras-Chave: *Cyberbullying* no Trabalho. Revisão sistemática. Práticas de RH.

Resumen: *El ciberbullying es una conducta intencionada y agresiva que se produce a través de medios digitales, de una persona a otra, y también se considera una extensión del bullying. La literatura actual carece de estudios que sistematicen el conocimiento disponible sobre este tema, con el objetivo de comprender el campo, identificar brechas y orientar futuras investigaciones. Por tanto, el objetivo del estudio es caracterizar la estructura conceptual del ciberbullying en el trabajo, identificando sus consecuencias individuales y organizativas. A través de una revisión sistemática de la literatura realizada en las bases de datos Web of Science y Scopus, sin delimitación temporal, fueron un total de 15 artículos los que conformaron la muestra. Los datos fueron analizados con el paquete Bibliometrix, identificándose un periodo de investigación de 2013 a 2024. La estructura conceptual del campo se divide en tres ejes: experiencias de ciberbullying; relación del ciberbullying con emociones, creatividad e intenciones de permanencia en la organización; y variables influyentes. Sus consecuencias individuales incluyen tensión mental, insatisfacción y efectos psicológicos, fisiológicos y psicossomáticos negativos. Para las organizaciones destacan la alta rotación, la caída del rendimiento, la productividad y el compromiso. Se identificaron prácticas de recursos humanos para mitigar el problema, como la seguridad laboral y el apoyo psicológico. Además, los resultados permitieron trazar una agenda para futuros estudios a partir de las brechas encontradas. Se espera que esta investigación contribuya a sensibilizar a directivos, organizaciones, trabajadores y a la sociedad en general sobre el ciberbullying y comprender sus efectos negativos en la vida laboral y personal.*

Palabras clave: *Ciberacoso en el lugar de trabajo. Revisión sistemática. Prácticas de recursos humanos.*

Introduction

The advancement of digital technology has profoundly transformed human interactions and work environments. Although this progress brings numerous benefits, such as greater connectivity and efficiency, it also presents significant challenges. Among these, cyberbullying stands out as an intentional, aggressive, and repetitive behavior that uses electronic means to harass and victimize individuals (Smith et al., 2008; Forssell, 2016).

Recently, according to a survey conducted by the Ipsos Institute and reported by Veja (2024), Brazil has classified cyberbullying as a crime, establishing prison sentences of 2–4 years for acts committed in virtual environments or transmitted in real time. The enactment of this new legislation underscores the seriousness with which the country, currently ranked second worldwide in cyberbullying cases, confronts this problem. This phenomenon, now recognized

as a global concern, transcends the boundaries of school-age youth and is equally manifested among adults in corporate settings (Madden & Loh, 2020).

As information and communication technologies expand, criminal activities such as cyberbullying transcend the physical limits of space and working hours. Cyberbullying can occur at any time and from any place with access to digital environments, through offensive emails, the dissemination of rumors, and exclusion from online communication groups (Charoensukmongkol, 2023). These practices have serious repercussions. Among the implications of cyberbullying for victims, psychological disorders such as depression and anxiety stand out as they can directly affect individual performance and team cohesion, ultimately undermining organizational performance (Coyne, Pinsky, & Barone, 2017). A case study conducted by Madden and Loh (2020) in a technology company illustrated this dynamic: employees who were victims of cyberbullying showed a 30% reduction in their daily efficiency and a 40% increase in requests for medical leave.

Solutions to the problems triggered by cyberbullying are complicated by the combination of anonymity and the accelerated dissemination of information facilitated by technology. This reality requires organizational policies and practices to manage and inhibit these behaviors in line with the digital context (Forssell, 2016). The absence of such measures not only exacerbates negative effects on employees but can also compromise organizational culture and team morale, creating a toxic, unproductive work environment (D’Cruz & Noronha, 2018).

Despite the relevance of this topic and the growing research interest in cyberbullying, gaps remain in the understanding of this phenomenon in organizational contexts. The current literature lacks a systematic analysis that integrates the main findings on the conceptual structure of cyberbullying and its individual and organizational consequences (Coyne et al., 2017; Madden & Loh, 2020; Zhang et al., 2022a). These gaps prevent researchers and organizations from developing and implementing clear policies to address cyberbullying, hindering the creation of a safe and welcoming work environment for professionals (Coyne et al., 2017).

In light of the above, this study is guided by the following research problem: “How is the conceptual structure of workplace cyberbullying characterized, and what are its individual and organizational consequences?” Accordingly, this study aimed to characterize the conceptual structure of cyberbullying at work and to identify its individual and organizational consequences. By contributing to a deeper understanding of cyberbullying in the workplace, this systematic review aims to provide guidance for developing human resource (HR) policies and practices to mitigate this problem (Madden & Loh, 2020).

Theoretical elements of the study

Cyberbullying enabled by modern technology has generated increasing concern in society. In the workplace, cyberbullying is a major problem that organizations are facing. This behavior is considered an extension of traditional bullying (Forssell, 2016). According to Smith et al. (2008), cyberbullying is understood as intentional and aggressive behavior perpetrated by a group or an individual, via electronic means of contact, repeatedly and over time, against a victim who cannot easily defend themselves.

In organizational contexts, Coyne et al. (2017) emphasized that this conduct is a negative workplace behavior that occurs through technology. The effects of this behavior can harm professionals’ well-being, impacting organizational productivity and performance (Coyne et

al., 2017; Madden & Loh, 2020; Kaylar et al., 2021; Oguz et al., 2023; Ciby & Sahai, 2024).

Cyberbullying is manifested through various forms of virtual communication (Cruz & Noronha, 2013; Charoensukmongkol, 2023). Stich (2020) noted that such behavior increasingly occurs online, via social media platforms, where information posted in cyberspace spreads rapidly, publicly humiliating victims. In this context, perpetrators display rude and harassing behaviors with the intention of harming victims (Oguz et al., 2023).

Workplace cyberbullying includes workers spreading malicious information online, sending offensive and aggressive emails, and sharing images and videos with the aim of humiliating colleagues (Madden & Loh, 2020). Individuals who engage in these behaviors make malicious comments, spread gossip and rumors, and thereby can compromise victims' performance and psychological health (Oguz et al., 2023). Conversely, workers who suffer such acts may experience depression and anxiety (D'Cruz & Noronha, 2018), mental strain (Farley et al., 2015), job dissatisfaction (Coyne et al., 2017), low productivity (Keskin et al., 2016), and turnover intentions (Muhonen et al., 2017).

Park and Choi (2019) further posited that this behavior can increase employee turnover in organizations. In addition, cyberbullying tends to intensify worker burnout, making the work environment less desirable. Victims may display antisocial behavior online and become more withdrawn in their communication with colleagues. Professionals targeted by such actions experience difficulties resolving the problem (Zhang et al., 2022b), and may even exhibit more aggressive behaviors in response (Jenaro, Flores, & Frías, 2018). Malik and Pichler (2024) reported that men tend to express more anger than women when faced with cyberbullying.

Cyberbullying also affects workers' creativity through psychological distress (Kaylar et al., 2021). It is perceived as a form of stress, leaving workers exhausted in relation to their responsibilities to the organization (Loh & Snyman, 2020). Given this reality, organizations must implement activities to counteract cyberbullying. Madden and Loh (2020) emphasized that educating workers about the effects of cyberbullying can help combat this behavior in the workplace. Leadership should therefore define effective anti-cyberbullying policies and communicate to employees the measures that will be taken when such acts occur. Organizations should promote initiatives against cyberbullying, encourage open communication among workers, strengthen teamwork, and, above all, make clear the policies that reinforce respect for others. Training and awareness-raising initiatives against this problem can yield positive results in combating cyberbullying in the workplace (Kaylar et al., 2021).

It is also important to highlight the legal and ethical implications of workplace cyberbullying. From a legal perspective, this phenomenon may constitute a violation of fundamental worker rights, such as dignity, honor, and integrity, and may give rise to liability when it causes harm to victims. Organizations, therefore, have a duty to ensure safe and healthy work environments (Zhang et al., 2022b).

From an ethical perspective, workplace cyberbullying violates fundamental principles such as respect, integrity, and responsibility in organizational relationships (Karabulut, 2016). This phenomenon is therefore reflected in aspects of organizational culture and in the need for practices that promote safer and more respectful work environments.

Methodological elements of the study

A systematic literature review (SLR) is a rigorous academic endeavor that identifies themes in a given field of study through explicit, systematic searches to assess the quality and validity of studies (De-La-Torre-Ugarte-Guanilo, Takahashi, & Bertolozzi, 2011). This review also incorporated bibliometric analyses, which help to represent the history and state of the art of a specific research field or topic (Aria, Misuraca, & Spano, 2020; Paul & Criado, 2020). In addition to mapping and assessing a scientific territory to specify a research problem and develop the knowledge base, an SLR enables the identification of research gaps (Tranfield, Denyer, & Smart, 2003; Silva, Moreira, & Alves, 2024).

To this end, this review adopted the protocol of Tranfield, Denyer, and Smart (2003), which comprises the stages of planning the review, conducting the review, and disseminating the knowledge. For these authors, the protocol must ensure that the review is less susceptible to researcher bias and does not compromise their capacity or creative freedom. In the first stage, the following research problem was defined: “How is the conceptual structure of workplace cyberbullying characterized, and what are its individual and organizational consequences?” Next, the databases used for the searches were defined: Web of Science and Scopus, selected for their relevance, temporal coverage, and the quality and quantity of journals they index (Chadegani et al., 2013).

Another key step in this initial stage was identifying other reviews to justify the need for the present study (Table 1). Advanced searches were carried out in the databases, using the title as the unit of analysis and the following strings: (“cyberbullying at work” OR “workplace cyberbullying”) AND (“systematic literature review” OR “systematic review”). No SLRs were found, which justifies the need to conduct a review to understand how this emerging field of management studies is constituted.

For the review stage, Table 2 presents the preliminary results. No time limits were set, in line with recommendations for reviews of this nature and in order to achieve broader coverage of the field (Page et al., 2021). Data collection took place in May 2024.

Table 1 - Searches in the Web of Science and Scopus databases

Database	Search strings	n
Web of Science	AI = (“cyberbullying at work” OR “workplace cyberbullying”)	38
Scopus	ARTICLE TITLE (“cyberbullying at work” OR “workplace cyberbullying”)	52
Total		90

Source: Research data (2024).

Of the 90 articles identified, the first inclusion filters were applied to define the sample (Orsiolli et al., 2024); duplicates were also removed (Table 2).

Table 2 – Database searches, inclusion criteria, and results

Database	Inclusion criteria	n
Web of Science	Document type: articles. Subject area: management.	13
Scopus	Document type: articles. Subject area: management, business, and accounting.	14
	Duplicates.	12
Total articles excluded after inclusion criteria and duplicates: 75		
Total	Final sample	15

Source: Research data (2024).

After applying the inclusion criteria, the 15 articles in the sample were read in full to verify their alignment with the topic and the research problem, and all were deemed eligible for

inclusion in the SLR. No additional criteria were defined to avoid further restricting the sample (Wegner et al., 2023).

In the final stage, the data were analyzed using RStudio software and the Shiny and Bibliometrix packages, which use a wide range of bibliometric and systematic analyses (conceptual, intellectual, and social structure) (Aria & Cuccurullo, 2017). To better organize and analyze the data, the following analytical categories, which emerged during the reading of the articles, were defined, along with the techniques used:

(i) Research profile and trajectories – annual evolution, authors, affiliations, journals, production by country (social structure of the field), and most cited articles;

(ii) Conceptual structure based on the thematic map (structure, consequences, and HR practices) – this analysis is useful for understanding the evolution of a given research topic over time. Terms that co-occur within a document (e.g., keywords) can form a co-occurrence network of terms (Aria et al., 2022). The conceptual map is divided into four quadrants. The motor themes quadrant is characterized by high density and centrality, consisting of well-developed themes that are important to the field. Basic themes are characterized by high centrality and low density, suggesting they are important to the field and reflect general themes shared across different areas of investigation. Emerging or declining themes have low centrality and density, meaning that they are underdeveloped and marginal to the field. Niche themes are highly developed and isolated, with well-established internal links (high density) but external links that are not relevant to the field (low centrality) (Cobo et al., 2011; Aria, Misuraca, & Spano, 2020).

(iii) Research agenda – developed from the suggestions presented by the authors of the sampled articles and from reflections that emerged during the reading process.

The analysis of the results enabled an understanding of the conceptual structure of this field of research, as well as identifying gaps and future possibilities. The following section presents these results.

Results and Discussion

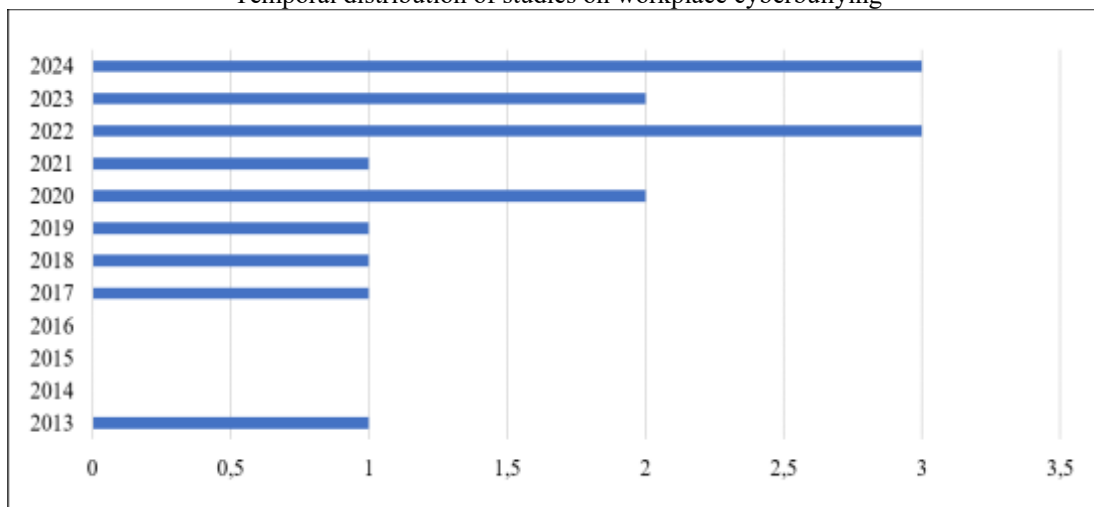
Research paths

The publication profile is characterized as follows: (i) type of research – 100% of the studies in the sample are theoretical-empirical; (ii) methodological approach – 20% (n = 3) of the studies are qualitative and 80% (n = 12) are quantitative; (iii) sectors investigated – 46.67% (n = 7) of the studies were conducted in the public sector, 13.33% (n = 2) in the private sector, and 40% (n = 6) in mixed sectors; (iv) temporal design – 100% of the studies adopted a cross-sectional design. This points to the first suggestion for future studies: the need for longitudinal research to better understand how cyberbullying behavior manifests over time (Ciby & Sahai, 2024).

According to the search parameters, the first publication indexed in the databases was in 2013, and in the three subsequent years, there was a hiatus in publications (Figure 1). Publications resume only in 2017, at which point they stabilize at an average of 1–2 articles per year through 2021; thereafter, the average number of publications increases to 2–3 per year. For 2024, it is important to note that the search covered publications only up to May, and the number

of studies identified is close to the average for previous years. These results represent an average annual growth rate of 10.5%. This increased interest in the topic can be attributed to two factors: the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, which led people to spend more time online (Ciby & Sahai, 2024), and rapid technological advancements (Alrawashdeh et al., 2024).

Figure 1
Temporal distribution of studies on workplace cyberbullying



Source: Research data (2024).

Zupic and Carter (2015) suggested that identifying connections and relationships among countries, universities, and researchers enables a better understanding of the scientific advances in a given research domain. In this regard, the 15 articles were written by 40 authors, of whom 7 authors wrote two articles each (proportion of 0.175) and 33 authors wrote only 1 article (proportion of 0.825). Of the total, only 1 article was single-authored (6.67%), and 14 articles were coauthored (93.33%). The 40 authors are affiliated with 25 different universities, with particular emphasis on three public universities: COMSATS University Islamabad (Islamabad, Pakistan), Massey University (Auckland, New Zealand), and the University of Canberra (Canberra, Australia), each with 4 publications.

Table 3 – The top 3 most productive journals in the sample

#	Journals	Publisher	Impact factor	Publications (n)
1	<i>International Journal of Human Resource Management</i>	<i>Taylor & Francis Online</i>	5.6	2
2	<i>Journal of Nursing Management</i>	<i>Wiley Online Library</i>	5.5	2
3	<i>Management Research Review</i>	<i>Emerald Insight</i>	2.6	2

Source: Research data (2024).

The most productive journals each published 2 articles (Table 3). These journals focus on HR management, nursing management, and general management topics. According to Bradford's Law, these journals are located in Zone 1 of productivity, meaning that a small number of journals concentrate most of the publications on a given topic. The remaining 9 journals each published only one article. Regarding the most cited articles in the sample (Table 4), Coyne et al. (2017) was the most cited, with 72 citations and an annual citation average of

9.00. This theoretical-empirical article investigated the relationship between cyberbullying, workers' mental strain, and job satisfaction. The second most cited study was by D'Cruz and Noronha (2013), with 54; the authors examined the cyberbullying experiences of IT sector employees in India.

Table 4 - Top 5 most cited articles on workplace cyberbullying

#	Authors	Year	Journals	Impact factor	Total citations (n)	Annual citation average
1	Coyne et al.	2017	<i>The International Journal of Human Resource Management</i>	5.6	72	9.00
2	D'Cruz & Noronha	2013	<i>Information and Organization</i>	6.2	54	4.50
3	Park & Choi	2019	<i>Journal of Nursing Management</i>	5.5	23	3.83
4	Loh & Snyman	2020	<i>Gender in Management: An International Journal</i>	3.7	22	4.40
5	Kaylar et al.	2021	<i>Management Research Review</i>	2.6	21	5.25

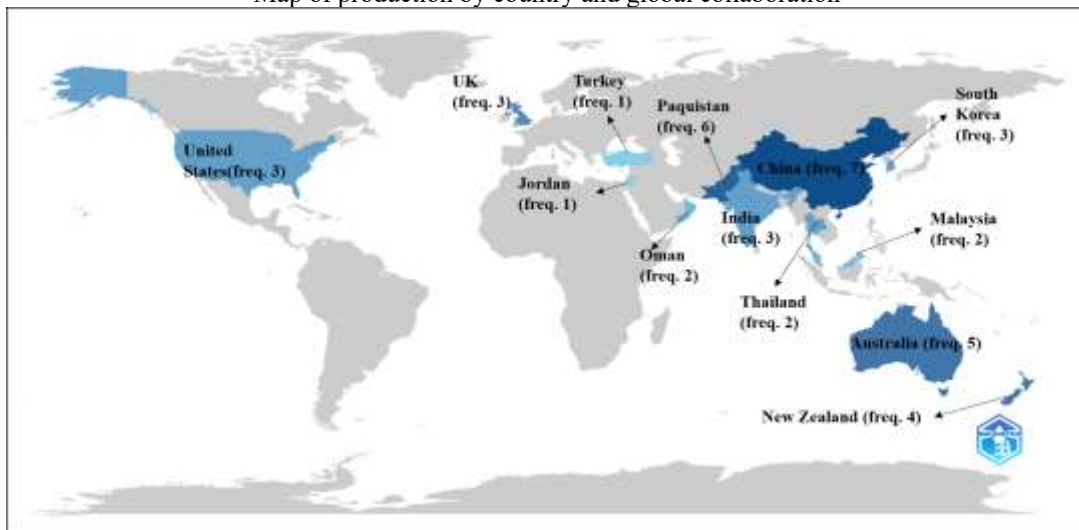
Source: Research data (2024).

Park and Choi (2019) investigated the effect of cyberbullying experiences on nurses' turnover intention, whereas Loh and Snyman (2020) explored the consequences of cyberbullying among men and women. The last of the most cited articles in the sample, by Kaylar et al. (2022), examined the effects of cyberbullying on employees' creativity, both directly and through psychological distress. These studies were published in high-impact journals with substantial relevance to the field of Management and Business.

The final analysis of research trajectories concerns productivity by country, which, according to Zupic and Carter (2015), enables an understanding of a given phenomenon through a sociodemographic lens. Viewing the global production map (Figure 2) reveals the countries that are most productive and most engaged with workplace cyberbullying.

Figure 2

Map of production by country and global collaboration



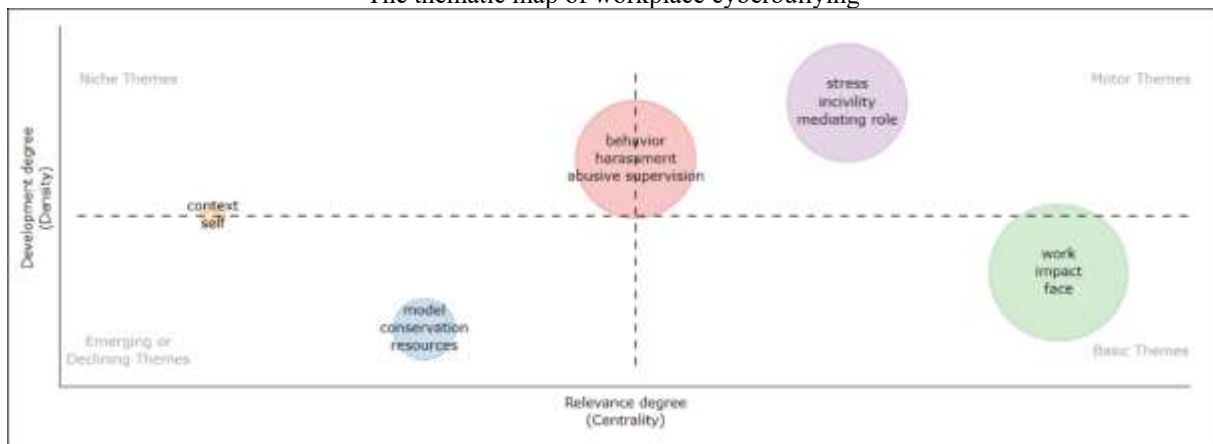
Source: Research data (2024).

Aria and Cuccurullo (2017) explained that this analysis enables an understanding of the social structure of a research corpus. In this regard, China, a developing country, leads scientific production (freq. = 7), followed by Pakistan (freq = 6), Australia (freq = 5), New Zealand (freq = 4), and the United Kingdom (freq = 4). The other countries produced an average of 1–3 articles. Notably, we observed strong interest among Asian countries in workplace cyberbullying research: Pakistan, Oman, Thailand, China, India, Malaysia, Jordan, South Korea, and Turkey (the majority of whose territory is in Asia, with a small part in Europe). Regarding collaborations, the most prominent were between Asian and North American countries, specifically Pakistan and the United States, which co-authored 2 studies. Other collaborations were also identified, including China and the United States, India and Oman, Malaysia and Turkey, Pakistan and Malaysia, and Pakistan and Turkey, each with 1 article. It is also important to highlight Brazil’s absence from international scientific research on workplace cyberbullying.

The conceptual structure of workplace cyberbullying

Similar to traditional bullying, cyberbullying is an important stressor in the workplace and affects worker outcomes at both individual and organizational levels (Kaylar et al., 2021). Thus, various studies have recommended examining the empirical and conceptual advances in this topic in the field of management, given that it has been widely studied with children and adults. Understanding its evolution through analysis of the thematic map (Figure 3) enables such understanding and the identification of the main research traditions (Aria et al., 2022).

Figure 3.
The thematic map of workplace cyberbullying



Source: Research data (2024).

The thematic map shows that the field of study’s conceptual structure is divided into 5 distinct clusters. The first cluster, located between motor and niche themes, comprises important and well-developed topics in the field. This cluster encompasses studies dedicated to investigating the relationship between cyberbullying and fear, anger, mental strain, and perceptions of organizational policies. The greater the exposure to cyberbullying, the higher the likelihood that workers will experience mental strain and reduced job satisfaction (Coyne et al.,

2021). Furthermore, manifestations of cyberbullying occur in connection with the organizational policies established within organizations (Malik & Pichler, 2022), as these policies can trigger negative emotions such as fear and anger among organizational members (Malik & Pichler, 2024). Workers who experience cyberbullying are more likely to vent their anger and frustration both in face-to-face and online environments, contributing to the perpetuation of cyberbullying and generating retaliatory behaviors (Malik & Pichler, 2022).

The second cluster, located in the quadrant of emerging or declining themes due to its low centrality and density, comprises studies that examine how workplace cyberbullying affects workers' intention to remain in their jobs (Ciby & Sahai, 2024). A negative relationship was identified: the greater the experience of cyberbullying, the more likely individuals are to leave the organization. This is one of the consequences that this type of behavior can generate for organizations, in addition to undermining well-being, performance, and engagement (Loh & Snyman, 2020).

The third cluster, situated in the quadrant of basic themes, addresses the experiences of cyberbullying among nurses. The research identifies three features that facilitate cyberbullying: (i) specific characteristics of the virtual environment used by the organization; (ii) the context; and (iii) factors related to cyberbullying itself (D'Souza et al., 2018). These findings, according to D'Souza et al. (2022), suggest that workplace cyberbullying occurred within a broader pattern of bullying behaviors that likely contribute to its occurrence through digital means. For this reason, Park and Choi (2019) had already recommended the urgency of implementing effective strategies to manage cyberbullying behaviors at work, aiming to prevent turnover, high costs, and low well-being.

The fourth cluster, identified in the quadrant of motor themes, is dedicated to understanding the effect of cyberbullying on individual creativity and suggests that cyberbullying reduces workers' creativity and increases psychological distress (Kaylar et al., 2021). In many cases, workers in such conditions may also show increases in interpersonal deviance, that is, behaviors that deviate from established social norms or acceptable interpersonal standards (Zhang et al., 2022a). In this context, the more exposed workers are to cyberbullying, the greater their emotional exhaustion tends to be (Charoensukmongkol, 2023).

Finally, the fifth cluster, located in the quadrant of niche themes and emerging or declining themes due to its intersection between quadrants, addresses a study dedicated to determining the variables that influence bystander intervention in cases of workplace cyberbullying (Madden & Loh, 2020). Two aspects can be considered: (i) the quality of the relationship between the victim and the bystander and (ii) the number of bystanders in relation to the likelihood of intervening in a situation.

Overall, the conceptual structure of workplace cyberbullying presents several research foci with a common thread: understanding the harmful effects of this behavior on individuals and organizations, using different types of studies, contexts, and epistemological approaches. In addition, this field of study is growing, and the main empirical evidence emerges from an understanding of workers' lived experiences of cyberbullying. This behavior has several individual and organizational consequences and, for this reason, the next section focuses on compiling and systematizing the consequences of workplace cyberbullying.

The consequences of workplace cyberbullying

Workplace cyberbullying is less well understood than traditional bullying because much of the research has focused on face-to-face interactions (Madden & Loh, 2020). Cyberbullying has specific characteristics, such as anonymity (which protects the perpetrator's identity), lack of supervision in virtual environments, the reach of technology, a larger audience witnessing the behavior, and the intensification and repetition of cyberbullying acts (Coyne et al., 2017). For this reason, the consequences of this behavior can be divided into individual-level consequences, which can have psychological, physiological, and psychosomatic effects, and organizational-level consequences (Coyne et al., 2017).

In the workplace, cyberbullying can increase stress and mental strain and decrease individuals' job satisfaction (Coyne et al., 2017; Madden & Loh, 2020). Many workers may experience reduced optimism, believing that their exposure to cyberbullying will take a long time to end (Farley et al., 2015). In this scenario, workers may develop feelings of anger, frustration, distress, and sadness and may be more likely to adopt a retaliatory attitude toward cyberbullying, that is, respond with further cyberbullying in an attempt to protect themselves and avoid the loss of personal resources (Malik & Pichler, 2022). According to these authors, it is widely acknowledged that victims of this behavior can develop well-being problems and, in more severe cases, anxiety and depression.

In light of these insights, Loh and Snyman (2020) emphasized that individuals may feel they have lost their social, intellectual, and psychological resources due to exposure to cyberbullying, which directly affects the organization. Furthermore, workers may lose interest in their work and gradually take vacations or sick leave more frequently (Ciby & Sahai, 2024). In such cases, workers may leave the organization in order to preserve their dignity and mental health (Charoensukmongkol, 2023).

Organizational-level consequences can include high direct and indirect costs due to staff turnover and may damage the organization's social reputation (Coyne et al., 2017). In addition, cyberbullying can reduce organizational commitment, undermine performance and productivity, and increase intentions to leave the organization (Coyne et al., 2017; Kaylar et al., 2021; Ciby & Sahai, 2024). Based on these consequences, it is imperative that managers, workers, and organizations in general understand the real effects and consequences of cyberbullying and seek ways to combat it and establish appropriate practices. The following section presents the HR practices identified in the sample studies to address the consequences of this intentional behavior.

HR practices to mitigate the consequences of cyberbullying

Organizations and managers must recognize that workplace cyberbullying is a serious form of harassment that negatively affects organizational performance and workers' emotions, attitudes, and behaviors (Ciby & Sahai, 2024). Ciby and Sahai (2024) recommended that organizations develop a reliable system that listens to workers, fostering the sense that they are heard and cared for by the organization, which, in turn, can deepen employees' emotional bond with the organization and increase their desire to stay. By doing so, organizations demonstrate

a commitment to creating a comprehensive organizational culture in which basic norms of respect, fairness, and consideration for all are established (Loh & Snyman, 2020).

Within this system, Zhang et al. (2022b) highlighted the important role of leaders in supporting victims of cyberbullying and dealing with perpetrators of this behavior in the organizational environment. Zhang et al. (2022b) also noted that identifying cyberbullying perpetrators is the first step in establishing strong practices and policies. In this context, leadership can provide support to workers and demonstrate care and concern. Given the anger individuals may develop from exposure to cyberbullying, HR managers can also develop emotional intelligence training programs to help reduce its impact on workers' lives (Malik & Pichler, 2024). Such programs can help individuals manage their feelings and emotions and reduce the tendency to retaliate with further cyberbullying.

It is therefore essential that HR develop policies and practices that clearly specify to all workers the norms of respect and preservation of others' dignity, aiming to reduce injustice and retaliatory behaviors and to increase trust-based relationships between colleagues and managers in order to create an anti-bullying and anti-cyberbullying policy (Coyne et al., 2021). Effective communication practices are crucial, both face-to-face and in digital environments. Managers can also implement educational training programs (through workshops and courses) to enhance understanding of the nature of cyberbullying and its effects, thereby enabling the rapid and effective identification and mitigation of this behavior (Madden & Loh, 2020).

According to Malik and Pichler (2022), HR should establish clear rules to ensure fairness, improve workers' perceptions of justice in organizational processes, encourage workers to speak up without fear, and, in some cases, provide rewards and bonuses. These practices should not only ensure justice but also guarantee transparency, open and fluid communication, and a fair incentive system to reduce cyberbullying practices (Charoensukmongkol, 2023). It is equally important that HR managers recognize the value of social relationships at work (Madden & Loh, 2020). Building a work environment that fosters friendships and camaraderie can be an effective strategy for creating a support and defense network against cyberbullying. Workers who have friends in the workplace tend to be more resilient and less susceptible to online aggression because they receive emotional and practical support from colleagues. In contrast, those who do not have friends at work are more vulnerable and therefore more likely to experience cyberbullying (Madden & Loh, 2020).

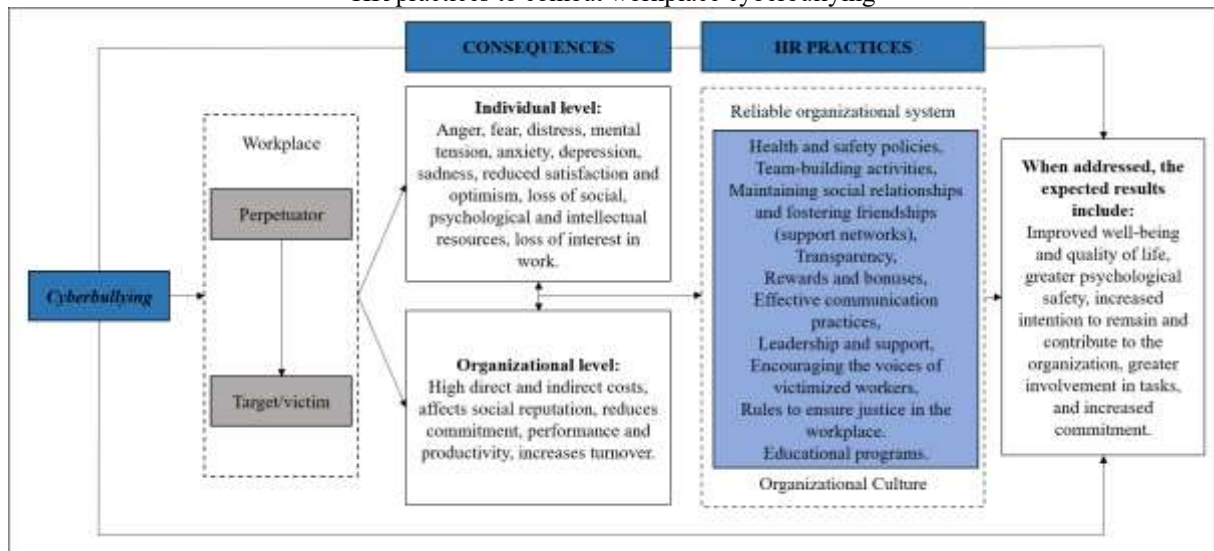
To strengthen these relationships, HR managers can implement practices such as team-building activities, mentoring programs, and regular social events. These initiatives not only improve employee morale but also foster a sense of community and belonging, thereby reducing the incidence of negative behavior. Another important practice concerns occupational health and safety policies regarding the use of digital communications and social media in the workplace. It is essential that all workers and managers receive professional etiquette training on the appropriate use of online communication technologies and social media at work. This training should include clear guidance on appropriate behavior, privacy, and professionalism in digital communications (Loh & Snyman, 2020).

In addition, both workers and managers must be trained to identify what constitutes workplace cyberbullying. This includes recognizing signs of digital harassment, such as offensive messages, social exclusion on online platforms, and the spread of rumors or false information. Loh and Snyman (2020) highlighted the importance of equipping workers with the

knowledge and tools needed to respond effectively to these counterproductive behaviors. Organizations should also establish clear procedures for reporting and dealing with cyberbullying incidents. This may involve creating confidential reporting channels, appointing individuals to investigate cases, and implementing appropriate disciplinary measures for offenders. By promoting a work environment where digital safety is a priority, organizations can better protect workers' well-being and maintain a safe, sustainable workplace.

Drawing on the consequences and practices identified in the sample articles, Figure 4 presents a conceptual analytical model that illustrates the process of incorporating HR practices and the expected outcomes.

Figure 4.
HR practices to combat workplace cyberbullying



Source: Created by the authors (2024).

By examining Figure 4, one can infer that managers may become more vigilant about cyberbullying and monitor the effects of HR practices designed to combat and mitigate this behavior (Madden & Loh, 2020). With such practices established and underway, increases in workers' performance, satisfaction, well-being, and quality of life are expected, which are essential aspects for individuals to remain engaged with their work (Madden & Loh, 2020; Malik & Pichler, 2024). According to these authors, HR practices should reflect the organization's systems and culture and align with established norms of respect.

In addition, integrating psychological support services (e.g., employee assistance programs) can offer specialized help to those who suffer the effects of cyberbullying. Regular awareness sessions and mental health workshops can increase knowledge and foster a more empathetic, understanding work environment. By adopting these practices, HR departments can play a crucial role in mitigating cyberbullying and fostering a healthy, productive workplace.

The conceptual structure of this field of study outlines a promising research agenda for a phenomenon that has attracted the attention of organizations and researchers worldwide. Understanding the consequences of workplace cyberbullying enables a clearer definition of practices to identify and combat such behavior. It is also possible to identify unexplored paths

in the literature. The next section presents a research agenda for the future.

What remains to be done? Potential avenues for future research

The studies in the sample, for the most part, reinforced the importance of experimental, longitudinal, and multimethod studies to achieve a more in-depth understanding of the phenomenon and to better understand causal inference for this variable (Coyne et al., 2017; D'Souza et al., 2018; Madden & Loh, 2020; Malik & Pichler, 2024). In addition, Malik and Pichler (2024) recommended conducting studies that examine mediating variables that explain the relationship between cyberbullying and other work-related variables (e.g., resilience, humility, optimism, coping, quality of life, bonds, [dis]engagement, etc.).

Based on the finding that workplace cyberbullying may occur within a broader pattern of bullying actions (D'Souza et al., 2022), it is possible to develop reflections and problematizations that may inspire studies on the various reasons for this result. First, in an era of rapid advances in artificial intelligence (AI), how can this tool help identify cyberbullying? How can AI contribute to the spread and escalation of cyberbullying behavior? How can AI help establish and delineate new organizational practices and monitor cyberbullying? These questions can advance this field by examining the relationship between AI and cyberbullying, given that none of the studies in the sample addressed it.

Furthermore, specific characteristics of cyberbullying remain unclear. Malik and Pichler (2024) proposed that cyberbullying experiences may differ between men and women, introducing a gender-based analytical perspective into this field. This raises at least two questions: (i) what are the facilitators of cyberbullying (e.g., financial condition, age, color, race, among others)? and (ii) what are the contextual facilitators of cyberbullying? These questions may increase understanding of the facilitators and contexts of this behavior and broaden insights arising from such reflections.

In this regard, none of the studies in the sample addressed remote or hybrid work scenarios. For this reason, we suggest the following questions: how can organizations monitor acts of cyberbullying in these work arrangements? How can HR managers develop new practices and policies for these arrangements? How can psychological safety be ensured for workers in telework and hybrid work? These questions can enrich understanding of these work arrangements, which, after the COVID-19 pandemic, have remained trends in the world of work.

Considering the Brazilian context, some reflections for future studies can be outlined: (i) how are Brazilian organizations responding to and managing cyberbullying? (ii) How is cyberbullying managed in family businesses? (iii) How are Brazilian organizations developing organizational practices to combat workplace cyberbullying? (iv) How are HR practices and policies being developed and incorporated into the work environment? (v) How are different generations dealing with experiences of workplace cyberbullying? (vi) How are workers "protecting themselves" from these experiences? These reflections may stimulate promising efforts to conduct studies in the Brazilian context, as well as provide robust data for comparative studies in other cultural contexts.

Cyberbullying can cause serious psychological harm to victims, including anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, and, in extreme cases, suicidal ideation. Its negative effects can be long-lasting and affect various areas of the victim's life. In the work context, cyberbullying can lead to increased stress, lower job satisfaction, reduced productivity, and higher absenteeism. Victims of workplace cyberbullying may feel isolated and helpless. Thus, it is expected that, with the suggestions presented here, organizations will be able to proactively address these issues and seek to establish a more humane, positive, healthy, and sustainable work environment.

Final considerations

The results of this SLR demonstrate that cyberbullying is a serious problem in the workplace and has individual and organizational impacts and consequences, suggesting that electronic media are the main channels through which such actions are perpetuated. Through the itineraries, it was possible to identify that the conceptual structure of this field is diverse and focuses on investigating the effects of cyberbullying (e.g., fear, anger, tension, and turnover intention) experiences, the impact of cyberbullying on creativity, and aspects of intervention. In addition, this structure unfolds into two empirical lines: the consequences of cyberbullying and HR practices to combat cyberbullying.

Given the intensive use of technology in work environments, bullying has penetrated and evolved together with technological means, transforming into cyberbullying. Investigations on this topic are therefore important. Research on workplace cyberbullying is highly valuable, and in this review, its theoretical contribution lies in providing a panoramic view of what has been studied and discovered to date. Its main theoretical contribution is presented as a synthetic conglomerate of real situations, consequences, and practices for combating workplace cyberbullying in the studies analyzed. It is emphasized that a systematic review provides an overall view of how studies on a given topic have been conducted and which further questions can be asked based on the gaps identified in the review. For this reason, the richness of the proposed research agenda is also evident as a theoretical contribution, as it encourages the deepening of the field through new possibilities and perspectives.

Similarly, the practical contribution of this review aligns with emerging issues surrounding workplace cyberbullying and its consequences, and can serve as a practical guide for actions to prevent this problem. From a practical standpoint, understanding the importance of a leader who, together with HR, can implement activities that add value is crucial to fostering an organizational culture that resists cyberbullying. This results in benefits not only in the short term but also in the long term, helping strengthen and balance teams, which, in turn, contribute to a consolidated and effective organizational mission and vision.

A limitation of this study is the fact that only two databases were used, which potentially restricted the identification of other studies. Hence, further research is recommended using additional databases to broaden the theoretical scope of the review. Comparative studies between national and international databases can also be suggested.

Workplace cyberbullying is a problem that invades employees' personal lives, causing disastrous psychological effects and raising concerns for an organization's future. Knowing how to prevent such events through HR practices strengthens and enriches organizational culture, making it essential that engagement with this topic grows and evolves alongside technological advances. One example of this is the growing motivation to use AI in favor of

humanity and social responsibility, which is a duty of organizations, both internally and externally, toward the broader community in which they operate.

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