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Article

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Systematic Review

Unveiling the Shadow of Workplace Cyberbullying in the Digital Age: A Call for Research in Africa

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Abstract: Workplace cyberbullying, exacerbated by the growing prevalence of digital work environments, has emerged as a significant threat to employee well-being and organisational productivity. Despite increasing research attention around the world, there is a critical gap in understanding the unique context and implications of cyberbullying within African workplaces, particularly those operating in digital spaces. This bibliometric analysis, utilising Scopus and Web of Science databases, systematically examines the publications on workplace cyberbullying from 2000 to 2024 using Microsoft Excel and visualisation tools such as VOS Viewer. The findings underscore a stark disparity in research focus, with most studies originating from developed countries and neglecting African organisations' specific challenges. Although South Africa and Ghana have made initial contributions, a comprehensive understanding of the prevalence, manifestations, and consequences of cyberbullying in diverse African cultural and organisational settings in Africa remains elusive. This study serves as a call to action for researchers and practitioners to prioritise investigations into cyberbullying in Africa, highlighting the need for culturally sensitive interventions and policies tailored to digital work environments. By addressing this research gap, organisations can promote healthier and more sustainable workplaces for employees across Africa.

Keywords: Africa; systematic review; digital business; digital transformation; human resource management; organisational sustainability; workplace cyberbullying



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1. Introduction

The work environment is undergoing substantial transformations driven by digitalisation in the present era. The influence of organisational structures and work practices transcends the physical domain to the digital domain, affecting employees and societal dynamics in potentially more harmful ways. Workplace practices have been identified as adversely affecting employee well-being and overall social welfare. Recognising employees as fundamental stakeholders in an organisation is essential, given their multifaceted contributions to business growth in all aspects of the organisation [1]. Employees are deemed crucial human resources and invaluable assets to achieve organisational sustainability. This significance is attributed to the nature of their work, which directly shapes the productivity of an organisation [2]. The emphasis on the crucial role of employees in achieving organisational sustainability highlights the critical importance of maintaining a competent and skilled workforce [3].

Organisational sustainability not only contributes to the well-being of employees but also ensures the establishment of entities that thrive and endure over the long term [4,5]. Building a sustainable organisation requires implementing employment practices, procedures, and policies that integrate work-life balance and overall employee well-being, promoting personal and family growth and enhancing performance [6]. However, a sustainable organisation's impact goes beyond employees' psychological well-being; it also plays a pivotal role in determining overall success [7]. This particular aspect of the organisation

has received limited attention in the relevant literature, involving a sense of belonging to meaningful communities and cultivating mutually rewarding short- and long-term interactions and relationships with others [8].

However, a significant number of organisations seem to prioritise environmental sustainability efforts, often disregarding issues such as workplace cyberbullying or verbal abuse and their potential impact on the psychological well-being of employees. Kaufman [9] pointed out that organisations frequently disclose and monitor their carbon emissions or engage in greenwashing, but initiatives addressing employee psychological well-being are lacking. Consequently, there is a shortage of reports on how organisational practices influence employees' psychological health and well-being. The existing research on organisational sustainability has focused predominantly on the impact of business and organisational activities on the physical environment, such as climate change and environmentally friendly practices, neglecting the crucial dimension of employee psychological well-being [5]. Despite the essential role in organisational sustainability, the literature on the holistic nature of organisational sustainability remains limited. Recognising this gap underscores the importance of uncovering underlying dimensions, such as workplace cyberbullying, that impact employees' work lives in organisations. Achieving organisational sustainability demands integration across all aspects of the organisation, including employees' psychological well-being, by examining workplace cyberbullying.

Cyberbullying in the workplace, defined as the intentional and repeated use of electronic communication to harm or harass others [10], has become increasingly prevalent due to the widespread adoption of ICTs in professional settings [11]. As traditional face-to-face interactions are replaced by digital communication, this form of bullying presents unique challenges due to its anonymity, persistence, and potential to reach beyond the physical workplace [12]. Although the impact of cyberbullying on victims is comparable to traditional bullying, the digital environment introduces additional complexities, such as the ability for harassment to occur anytime and anywhere there is internet access, including through personal devices [13,14]. Understanding these distinctions is crucial for developing effective intervention programmes that address the specific motivations and consequences of cyberbullying [15]. The repercussions of cyberbullying extend beyond the targeted individuals, affecting witnesses and potentially creating a climate of fear and retaliation within the workplace [14,16].

Exploring cyberbullying in the workplace is a captivating and relatively unexplored territory, especially given the widespread integration of computing technologies and the flexibility of virtual work practices and online labour markets. The predictions indicated that approximately 1.3 billion people would be involved in virtual work by 2015, an ever-growing number and multinational organisations are gradually adopting virtual teams [17,18]. The potential advantages of computer-mediated technologies are substantial, influencing both productivity and employee well-being. Clear guidelines are necessary to properly use communication technologies, which can negatively impact organisational efficiency and employee health. [19]. From a pragmatic perspective, there is an urgent need for a consistent definition and comprehensive understanding of cyberbullying at work. This clarity is indispensable for various professionals, such as human resources (HR) practitioners, occupational health and safety (OHS) personnel, therapists, lawyers, regulatory authorities, policymakers, union representatives, and other intervention specialists, to recognise and address the instances of cyberbullying at work. The current challenge facing practitioners in tackling the workplace is attributed to the absence of a well-defined concept [20]. A universally accepted definition is crucial to guide the development of policies and training programmes and facilitate the identification of workplace cyberbullying incidents at work [19]. Despite the significant challenges in employee relations, workplace cyberbullying at work remains relatively unexplored in the realm of employee relations [16], especially from an African workplace perspective. This study seeks to fill this gap by investigating digital workplaces as potential contexts for cyberbullying, highlighting the neglect from an African perspective.

Despite the extensive exploration of cyberbullying in behavioural sciences and organisational research, significant gaps persist in the current body of literature [21]. A notable void involves the limited examination of digital workplaces or online labour markets in the current literature as settings for cyberbullying [14,22]. Most studies on workplace cyberbullying have been conducted in Western nations such as the United States, the United Kingdom, and Canada [21,23–25], with little or no attention given to African countries. Although substantial evidence underscores the impact of cyberbullying across various occupational contexts, there is a shortage of research focusing specifically on this issue among employees in digital workplaces, particularly in Africa. Limited attention has been directed toward examining the distinctive characteristics of cyberbullying at work, with only a few studies explicitly investigating this phenomenon, and even fewer have investigated its prevalence [19,26]. The existing research on cyberbullying in Africa is scarce, and there is a lack of evidence on effective prevention strategies. As research progresses, efforts should be directed towards identifying and implementing effective measures to prevent cyberbullying at work, particularly in Africa.

The move towards digital workspaces has significant implications for the future exploration of workplace cyberbullying, as a considerable proportion of employee communication with colleagues and stakeholders is expected to shift to ICTs instead of face-to-face interactions. Studies on cyberbullying have focused on adolescents, youth, and educational settings, with limited research conducted among the working population [26]. Consequently, there is an indication that the settings experiencing workplace cyberbullying might become more prevalent [27]. However, the research on the distinctive characteristics of cyberbullying in the workplace remains limited. Few studies have explicitly focused on workplace cyberbullying in Africa, and even fewer have investigated its prevalence. Exploring the impact of workplace cyberbullying is an evolving field that requires the identification of causal relationships and a better understanding of the influence of cyberbullying in the workplace. Currently, there is limited research evidence on cyberbullying in the workplace, and even fewer studies have addressed effective prevention strategies. As research advances, it is crucial to identify measures to prevent cyberbullying in the workplace. However, researchers have ignored the phenomenon of cyberbullying in the workplace in the African context. This study aims to highlight the plight of neglected research on cyberbullying in African countries and make recommendations for future research on workplace cyberbullying in African countries to fill this gap. This paper aims to introduce an initial bibliographic investigation of cyberbullying in digital workplaces, highlighting the neglect of research on cyberbullying in the African workplace.

2. Cyberbullying at Work

Smith et al. [10] characterise cyberbullying as an aggressive, intentional act carried out by a group or individual, using electronic forms of contact, repeatedly and over time against a victim who cannot easily defend himself. Smith et al. [10] define three key elements: intent to harm the target, repetitive nature, and power imbalance between perpetrator(s) and the victim. Researchers such as Gannet [28] described cyberbullying in the workplace as someone who hides their identity behind a computer and attacks their target through electronic devices. Vranjes et al. [14] defined cyberbullying as negative behaviour that stems from the work environment that is repeatedly executed over time via ICT or at least a single instance employing digital technology that invades an individual's personal life, possibly making them subject to a wide online viewership, thus making the victim feel exposed, vulnerable, powerless, and incapable of self-defence. Symons et al. [29] also described workplace cyberbullying as a continuous, negative, and unwelcome behaviour that uses digital technology within an individual's workplace by an unidentified perpetrator whose aggressive behaviour knows no boundaries, trapping the victim in a relentless predicament and unable to escape the situation. Online disinhibition and rapid dissemination can cause significant physical and mental distress in targeted individuals. The ease of acting without restraint online and the rapid spread of such behaviours result in considerable emotional

and physical harm to the targeted individual [29]. Workplace cyberbullying is characterised by an imbalance of power, where the aggressor possesses either a greater official position (for example, a higher rank within the hierarchy) or a more substantial informal influence (such as connections within a network of peers) than the targeted employee. This disparity makes it difficult for targeted employees to resist or counteract negative behaviours directed at them [30].

Workplace cyberbullying encompasses a range of negative online actions carried out by one employee toward another, which could be perpetrated by a colleague (horizontal cyberbullying), supervisor (downward cyberbullying), or junior staff member (upward cyberbullying) on an employee (victim) through digital communication. These negative actions can be direct, where hostility or rudeness is clear and open, or indirect, involving more hidden or subtle forms of aggression [31]. Direct negative actions include harassment, aggression, intimidation, threats, circulating rumours, insulting remarks, mockery, hacking into targeted employees' email accounts [32], and the public disparagement of employee work or performance on corporate intranets or online forums [31]. It is important to note that these negative actions are repeated acts of intimidation, lowering one's dignity, humiliation, undermining, and degradation that occur in private or in front of colleagues, clients, and customers. They are intentional and pose a risk to the health and safety of the targeted employees. In cyberbullying in the workplace, the repetition of negative and harmful behaviours toward the same targeted employee establishes a link between intentionality and cyberbullying [32].

Symons et al. [29] highlighted the following four characteristics of cyberbullying in the workplace. First, workplace cyberbullying, defined as persistent unwanted acts stemming from the work environment that is carried out through digital technology, shares several similarities with other forms of workplace aggression, such as traditional bullying and harassment. Characterised by repeated and unwanted negative intimidation or aggression towards a targeted employee, this bullying is not a one-time occurrence but rather persistent and continuous for an indefinite period. The online nature of cyberbullying in the workplace allows people to save these acts and even repeatedly refer to them, which can further victimise the employee being bullied. Because it happens online, bullying acts can be recorded and revisited, exacerbating the victimisation of the targeted employee. Second, due to its delivery through digital technology, cyberbullying can be accessed through any device or digital platform. The online nature of the workplace allows perpetrators to save and reuse negative acts. In addition, using electronic media means that private matters can become public, enabling multiple people to view the negative content about the targeted employee.

Third, the issue of faceless perpetrators; the anonymity of workplace cyberbullying perpetrators makes them feel invisible and fearless. This sense of invisibility encourages them to use aggressive language and share private information as they feel less accountable for their actions. Identifying these aggressors is difficult, allowing them to act further without fear of repercussions, leading to more uninhibited and harmful online behaviour. Fourth, non-border workplace cyberbullying distinguishes between a person's private and public lives. Unlike traditional bullying, which ends when an individual leaves their workplace, workplace cyberbullying continues to intrude upon their private life, persistently invading their personal space and undermining the peace of their private sphere. Consequently, the person targeted by cyberbullying finds no respite simply by leaving the workplace, thereby losing their comforting sense of distance and safety.

2.1. Antecedence of Cyberbullying in the Workplace

Antecedents are actions that must occur before cyberbullying occurs. In cyberbullying in the workplace, two antecedents must be present: a blend of the workplace environment and digital technology. First, the workplace is a significant antecedent of cyberbullying [29], with factors such as justice, organisational culture, organisational climate, support, and leadership playing crucial roles [33]. A competitive and high-pressure environment and

an organisational climate with poor support can lead to more cyberbullying at work. The organisational culture, including shared values and unwritten norms, influences group behaviour and lenience toward cyberbullying in the workplace. Hierarchical and market cultures incite cyberbullying in the workplace due to interpersonal power struggles linked to a scarcity of resources.

Furthermore, organisational leadership that lacks support, recognition, respect, and effective organisation strategies, coupled with weak management and insufficient HR policies, further exacerbates cyberbullying in the workplace by failing to deter it effectively [29]. Second, cyberbullies use digital technology as the primary tool for negative actions. For example, email at work makes it easier to distribute private or unwanted information to the entire organisation. Additionally, social media platforms and smartphones allow cyberbullies to spread malicious acts beyond workplace boundaries [29].

2.2. Outcomes and Consequences of Workplace Cyberbullying

Workplace cyberbullying also impacts an organisation in that the quality of care provided is compromised, and there may be an increase in financial loss and a negative image of the workplace. Furthermore, increased absenteeism decreases employee morale, and a lack of employee loyalty, trust, or teamwork is possible [29]. Organisations also face the damaging ramifications of cyberbullying in the workplace. Workplace cyberbullying compromises the efficacy and integrity of an organisation's information systems. Increased employee turnover, lawsuits by victimised employees, and negative publicity harm the organisation's overall performance. By damaging two strategic assets, their employees and information systems, cyberbullying compromises the effective use of these resources, which is key to creating a competitive advantage [34].

Cyberbullying at work could be a form of stress. While stressors that produce temporary stress can be distressing, chronic stress can affect an individual's physical and mental health in the long term, which may be evident in the case of workplace cyberbullying [34]. Cyberbullying in the workplace leads to psychological distress. Distress refers to the negative dimension of stress. Psychological distress is defined as a multifaceted mental health phenomenon that manifests itself through decreased mental well-being with nonspecific symptoms (e.g., depression and anxiety). However, psychological distress can also include somatic symptoms (e.g., headache and insomnia) and other behavioural and functional problems [35].

Cyberbullying in the workplace adversely affects employee motivation, job performance, and satisfaction [34]. Experiencing or witnessing cyberbullying causes employees to feel threatened and scared, leading to job dissatisfaction and quitting [32]. Cyberbullying at work leads to reduced job performance, satisfaction, and loss. Job satisfaction is important for employees because it is a crucial motivational mechanism that drives their engagement, performance, and productivity, resulting in anxiety, mental strain, intention to leave, and job dissatisfaction. Workplace cyberbullying adversely affects employee motivation, job performance, and satisfaction [34].

Workplace cyberbullying exposure can harm organisational commitment, leading to less commitment to the organisation, leading to demotivation, and forcing them to quit. It is associated with increased absenteeism, higher attrition rates, and lost productivity. In addition, it indirectly increases the need for frequent recruitment and leads to less effective organisational strategies, destructive leadership, and team conflict [32]. Experiencing cyberbullying at work also affects an individual's functioning in the organisation. Workplace cyberbullying results in many such problems, including mental strain and a variety of negative emotions; physiological symptoms, including pain, sleep problems, and problems with concentration; social problems, such as increased irritability and more frequent conflicts; and mental problems, such as low self-confidence and lowered optimism levels [35].

An important outcome of cyberbullying in the workplace is exhaustion. Work exhaustion refers to burnout's basic individual stress dimension (i.e., the depletion of individuals' mental resources that are exceeded by high job demands that induce work exhaustion). As

a consequence of work-related stress, work exhaustion represents a decreased well-being factor of the three dimensions of burnout, while cynicism and reduced professional effectiveness are negative work-related attitudes. Cyberbullying in the workplace leads to work that is related to a higher intention to leave the job, as well as mental and physical health problems [35]. Consequently, victims can become mentally exhausted, leaving them with little or no energy to enjoy their jobs. Cyberbullying in the workplace reduces work engagement. Work engagement is a long-term positive state of work-related well-being, characterised by feeling motivated, energetic, and dedicated to one's work. It is a crucial concept in dealing with work-life challenges, as it has been found to have various positive consequences, including improving work performance and preventing burnout. Therefore, the threat that workplace cyberbullying poses to work engagement can have serious and far-reaching consequences [35].

In the workplace, cyberbullying victimisation is another outcome with negative consequences for workers over time. It can erode trust, cohesion, and collaboration in the work community and, as a result, have financial implications for organisations if employees are, for example, dissatisfied, absent, performing poorer, or about to resign [36]. Additionally, the victimisation of cyberbullying in the workplace is also associated with stress experienced due to the use of technology, namely, technostress [37]. Technostress refers to the difficulties in managing the demands of technology usage and is triggered by technostressors, which can potentially lead to strain [38]. Technostressors include techno-invasion (i.e., the invasive effect of being constantly connected and reachable), techno-overload (i.e., having to work faster and longer due to technology), techno-complexity (i.e., feeling inadequate due to one's skills in using technology), techno-insecurity (i.e., fear of one's job as a result of increasing automation or not having sufficient technological skills), and techno-uncertainty (that is, the unsettling effect of constant technological advances causing the need for constant education) [38]. Technostress can lead to many negative outcomes, including reduced job performance, job satisfaction, and increased symptoms of burnout [35].

3. Materials and Methodology

Bibliometric analysis is a widely used analytical method in the systematic literature that quantitatively evaluates scholarly works [39–43]. This methodology includes assessing productivity, such as publications and impact, encompassing citations of research materials, such as articles, and contributors, such as authors, institutions, countries/territories, funders, and subject areas. Examining these elements constitutes “performance analysis”, a vital component of bibliometric analysis [44]. The key strength of the bibliometric analysis for this research was its expansive coverage and intricate details. As a form of big data analytics powered by technology, bibliometric analysis collects data from databases and uses algorithms to effectively manage, structure, analyse, and objectively present bibliometric data. The substantial value of bibliometric research in this context arises from its ability to handle, organise, analyse, and report complex bibliometric data, which encompasses attributes of publications and contributors, along with content markers such as year of publication, keywords, and references. This comprehensive overview provides nuanced insights, key trends, knowledge gaps, implications, and future directions [42].

For this study, the fundamental four-step method was used to collect data, as specified by Saif and Purbasha [45]. The four fundamental steps were literature exploration, selection, data and information abstraction, and result reporting. We conducted a comprehensive search of published research papers on workplace cyberbullying. First, the Scopus and the Web of Science databases were selected for the current research because of their comprehensiveness and multidisciplinary coverage for literature exploration. Scopus is purposefully designed for bibliographic searches and citation analysis, showing its effectiveness in fulfilling search-related tasks [46]. Farooq [47] noted that Scopus covers a wider range of journals, and its citation analysis is more rapid, incorporating more articles.

The PRISMA flow chart in Figure 1 illustrates the clear and logical steps to ensure the methodological rigour in this research. Consequently, Scopus and Web of Science were used in this study to retrieve relevant metadata for research on workplace cyberbullying. Second, the Scopus and Web of Science databases were compared for their use and relevance in the field, employing the terms “cyberbullying”, “workplace”, “developing countries”, and “Africa”. Third, to collect the data, search filters were applied to specific criteria: subject area (workplace cyberbullying), country, document type, publication per year, source title, keywords, occurrences, and source type. The Scopus database and Web of Science were used as the title search options to retrieve bibliographic information on articles published on workplace cyberbullying. The focus of the search was strictly on studies published between 2000 and 2024, which were sufficiently large to warrant bibliometric analysis because the analysis was designed to handle large volumes of bibliometric data. Fourth, Microsoft Excel Workbook and VOS viewer software 1.6.20 were used to construct network maps based on the acquired bibliographic information to begin analysing and reporting the results. The files were downloaded from the Scopus database separately as plain text and then combined and transformed so that Microsoft Excel could read them. Microsoft Excel was also used to count data in journals and countries and calculate the trend of publications on workplace cyberbullying in the workplace in Africa.

Data for this study were gathered from Scopus, a widely used database in bibliometric analysis, along with Web of Science in Table 1, as Page et al. [48] recommended. The search query focused on “workplace cyberbullying” from 2000 to 2024, with the earliest publication in 2008. The literature encompasses all of these types. Initially, 64 Scopus documents and 100 documents from the Web of Science were retrieved, of which 28 documents from Scopus and 25 from the Web of Science were deemed suitable for bibliometric analysis (Table 1).

Table 1. Articles used in bibliometric analysis.

Articles	
1	Ababneh, R. and W.A. Ahmadah, <i>Exploring bullying behaviours from the perspective of physicians and nurses in Jordanian public hospitals</i> . Employee Relations: The International Journal, (2022). 45(1), p. 121–139. [49]
2	Coyne, I., S. Farley, C. Axtell, C. Sprigg, L. Best and O. Kwok, <i>Understanding the relationship between experiencing workplace cyberbullying, employee mental strain, and job satisfaction: A dysempowerment approach</i> . The International Journal of Human Resource Management, 2017 28(7), p. 945–972. [25]
3	D’cruz, P. and E. Noronha, <i>Navigating the extended reach: Target experiences of cyberbullying at work</i> . Information and Organisation, 2013. 23(4), p. 324–343. [27]
4	Desrumaux, P., C. Hellemans, P. Malola, and C. Jeoffrion, <i>How do cyber and traditional workplace bullying, organisational justice, and social support affect psychological distress among civil servants?</i> Le travail Humain, 2021. 3, p. 233–256. [50]
5	Dhungana S., K., H. Zaidi, N. Mishra, and A. Kuffour, A. <i>Xenophobic bullying, and COVID-19: An exploration using big data and qualitative analysis</i> . International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health, 2022. 19(8), 4824. [51]
6	D’Souza, N., D. Forsyth, D. Tappin, and B. Catley, <i>Conceptualising workplace cyberbullying: Toward a definition for research and practice in nursing</i> . Journal of Nursing Management, 2018. 26(7), p. 842–850. [52]
7	Farley, S., L. Coyne, C. Axtell, and C. Sprigg, <i>Design, development and validation of a workplace cyberbullying measure, the WCM</i> . Work and Stress, 2016 30(4), p 293–317. [53]
8	Farley, S., L. Coyne, C. Sprigg, C. Axtell, and G. Subramanian, <i>Exploring the impact of workplace cyberbullying on trainee doctors</i> . Medical Education, 2015. 49(4), p. 436–443. [26]
9	Gardner, D.H. and W. Rasmussen, <i>Workplace bullying and relationships with health and performance among a sample of New Zealand veterinarians</i> . New Zealand Veterinary Journal, 2018 66(2), p. 57–63. [54]

Table 1. Cont.

Articles	
10	Gardner, D., M. O'Driscoll, H.D. Cooper-Thomas, M. Roche, T. Bentley, B. Catley, B., . . . & T. Trenberth, <i>Predictors of workplace bullying and cyber-bullying in New Zealand</i> . International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health, 2016. 13 (5), p. 448. [55]
11	Henry, J., R. Croxton, and R. Moniz, (2023). <i>Incivility and dysfunction in the library workplace: A five-year comparison</i> . Journal of Library Administration, 2023. 63 (1), p. 42–68. [56]
12	Hong, J.C., L. Chien-Hou, M.Y. Hwang, R.P. Hu, and Y.L. Chen, <i>Positive affect predicting worker psychological response to cyber-bullying in the high-tech industry in Northern Taiwan</i> . Computers in Human Behaviour, 2014. 30 , p. 307–314. [57]
13	Kelly, L. "I know it shouldn't, but it still hurts" bullying and adults: Implications and interventions for practice. Nursing Clinics, 2011. 46 (4), p. 423–429. [58]
14	Kowalski, R.M., A. Toth, and M. Morgan, <i>Bullying and cyberbullying in adulthood and the workplace</i> . The Journal of Social Psychology, 2018 158 (1), p 64–81. [59]
15	Lund, E.M. and S. Ross, S. W. <i>Bullying perpetration, victimisation, and demographic differences in college students: A review of the literature</i> . Trauma, Violence, and Abuse, 2017. 18 (3), p. 348–360. [60]
16	Nielsen, M.B., Parveen, S. and L.B. Finne, <i>Workplace mistreatment and insomnia: a prospective study of child welfare workers</i> . International Archives of Occupational and Environmental Health, 2023. 96 (1), p. 131–141. [61]
17	Rowe, M. <i>Fostering constructive action by peers and bystanders in organisations and communities</i> . Negotiation Journal, 2018. 34 (2), p. 137–163. [62]
18	Smaller, MD, <i>The plague of bullying: In the classroom, the psychoanalytic institute, and on the streets</i> . Psychoanalytic Inquiry, 2013. 33 (2), p. 144–152. [63]
19	Syed, N., A.B.A. Hamid, X. Su, and M.H. Bhatti, <i>Suffering doubly: Effect of cyberbullying on interpersonal deviance and dual mediating effects of emotional exhaustion and anger</i> . Frontiers in Psychology, 2022. 13 , 941235. [64]
20	Symons, M.M., H. Di Carlo, and M. Caboral-Stevens, <i>Workplace cyberbullying exposed: A concept analysis</i> . Nursing Forum, 2021. 56 (1), p. 141–150. [29]
21	Tofler, I.R. <i>Bullying, hazing, and workplace harassment: The nexus in professional sports as exemplified by the first NFL Wells report</i> . International Review of Psychiatry, 2016. 28 (6), p. 623–628. [65]
22	Vranjes, I., E. Baillien, H. Vandebosch, S. Erreygers, and H. De Witte, <i>When workplace bullying goes online: Construction and validation of the Inventory of Cyberbullying Acts at Work (ICA-W)</i> . European Journal of Work and Organisational Psychology, 2018. 27 (1), p. 28–39. [66]
23	Williams, K.S., <i>Unsociable speech: Critical discourses on cyber incivility from inside the non-profit sector in Canada</i> . Qualitative Research in Organisations and Management: An International Journal, 2020. 15 (3), p. 349–369. [67]
24	Woudstra Marit, H., E. Janse van Rensburg, M. Visser, and J. Jordaan, <i>Learner-to-teacher bullying as a potential factor influencing teachers' mental health</i> . South African Journal of Education, 2018. 38 (1), p. 1–10. [68]
25	Zhang, S. and D. Leidner, D. <i>From improper to acceptable: How perpetrators neutralise workplace bullying behaviours in the cyber world</i> . Information and Management, 2018. 55 (7), p. 850–865. [69]

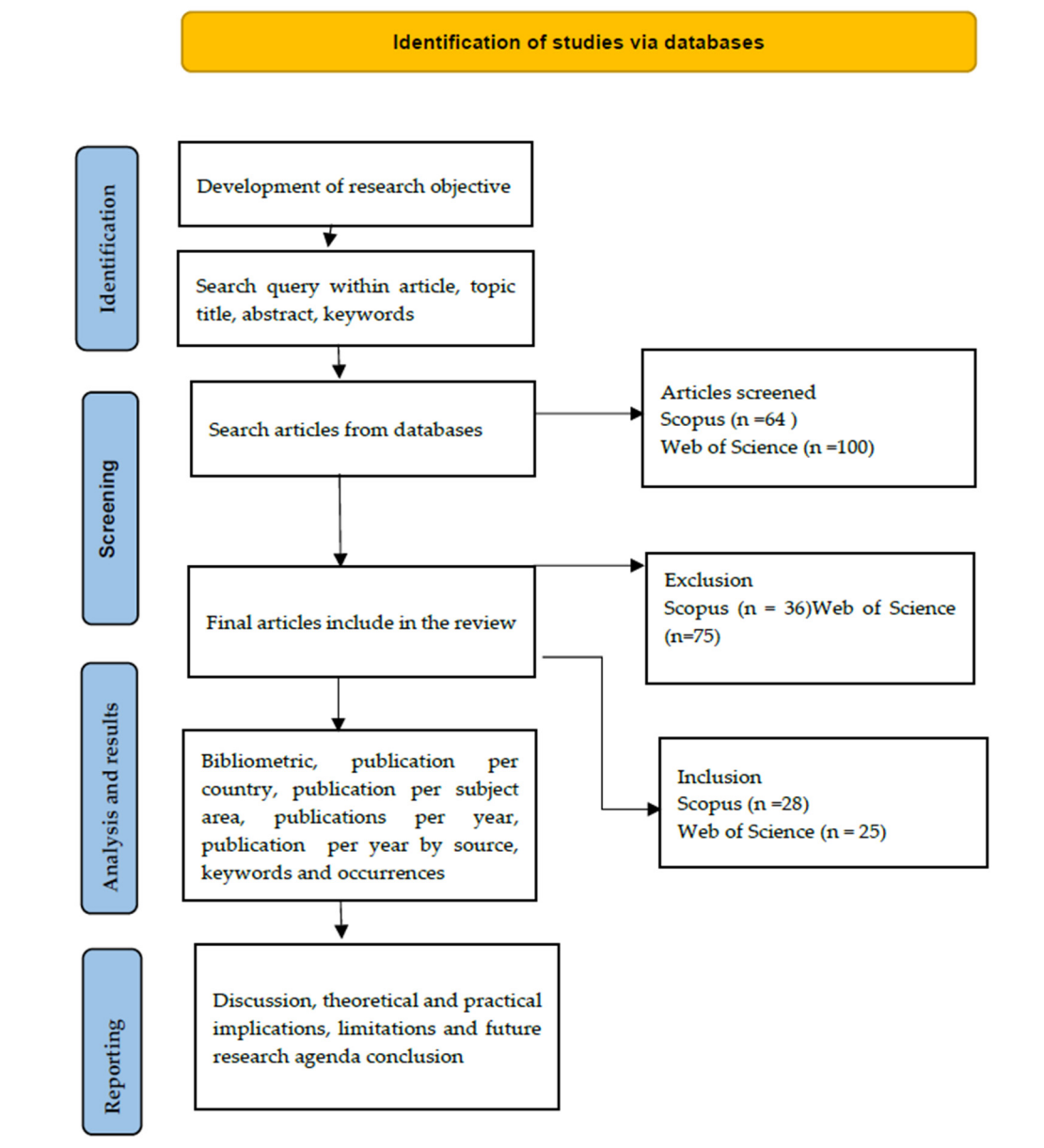


Figure 1. PRISMA flow diagram of article selection and study methodology.

4. Results

4.1. Publication per Country

These documents originate from 21 countries, as shown in Table 2. Figure 2 illustrates the top ten countries with the most publications on cyberbullying in the workplace. The United States has 18 publications, marking the highest count by any country in the Scopus database. Malaysia, a developing nation, is closely followed by seven publications, while the United Kingdom ranks third with six publications among other countries. The following are Pakistan and South Korea, with five document publications, followed by Australia, China, and India, each with four. In conclusion, the list was comprised of Belgium and New Zealand, each with three document publications.

Documents by country or territory

Compare the document counts for up to 15 countries/territories.

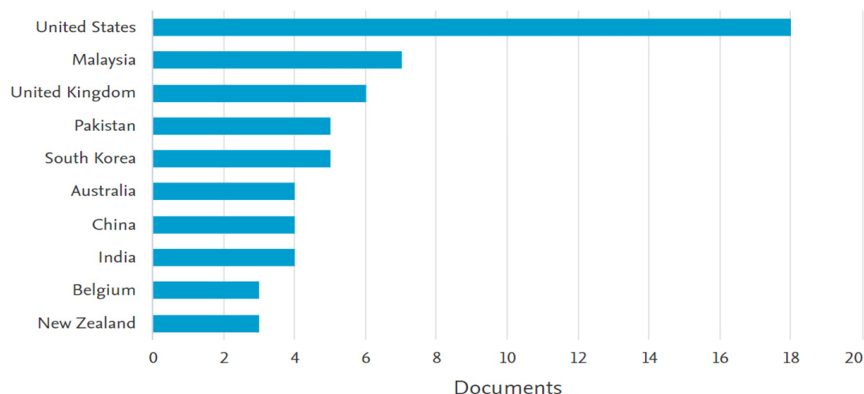


Figure 2. Documents per country.

Table 2. Documents per country.

Country	Document	Citations
United States	18	200
Malaysia	7	53
United Kingdom	6	247
Pakistan	5	53
South Korea	5	58
Australia	4	237
China	4	30
India	4	5
Belgium	3	131
New Zealand	3	28
South Africa	3	131
Spain	3	7
Germany	2	8
Thailand	2	15
Ghana	1	0
Indonesia	1	0
Israel	1	0
Japan	1	11
Jordan	1	0
Oman	1	2
Sri Lanka	1	0

4.2. Publication per Subject Area

The collected data revealed the various academic disciplines in which cyberbullying research has been published in the workplace. As shown in Figure 3, business and management represented the highest proportion (21.5%), followed by the social sciences (18.2%), psychology (16.5%), economics (11.6%), computer science (8.3%), medicine (7.4%), nursing (5%), arts and humanities (3.3%), engineering (3.3%), health professionals (2.5%), and other fields (2.5%). Furthermore, data from Web of Science (Figure 4) indicate that management had the most publications with eight, followed by information science library science (three), nursing (three), applied psychology (three), public environmental sciences (three), environmental sciences (two), multidisciplinary psychology (two), information from computer sciences (one), criminology and penology (one), and educational sciences (one).

Documents by subject area

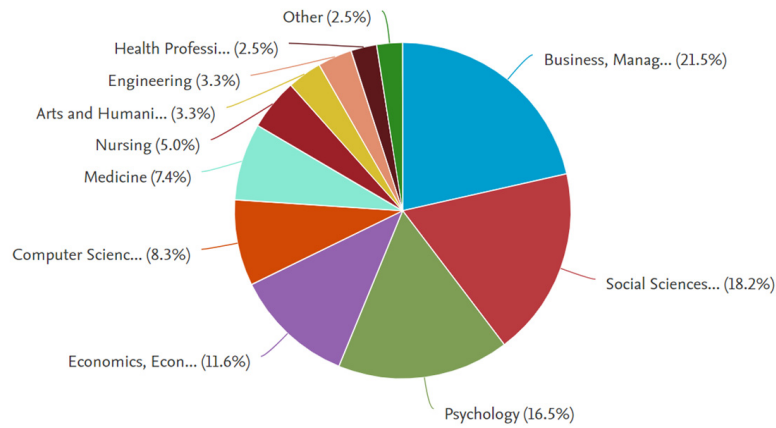


Figure 3. Documents per area/subject.

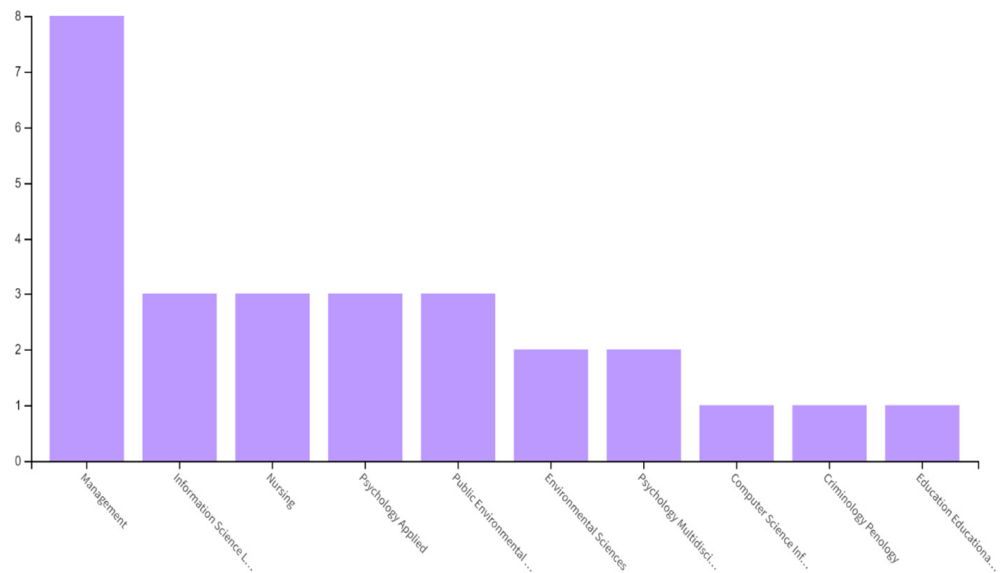


Figure 4. Publication bar chart by area.

4.3. Publication per Year

Figure 5 shows the publication trends in the workplace from 2009 to 2024, revealing fluctuations in publication rates over time. In particular, there was a decrease in publications from 2009 to 2010, followed by relatively steady numbers from 2011 to 2012 and another drop in 2013. The publications remained consistent from 2014 to 2016, with only one yearly publication. However, there was a notable increase from 2017 to 2019, with the number of publications rising from two to eight. There was a slight decline to five publications in 2020, and interest in research on cyberbullying in the workplace jumped to ten publications in 2021. The trend will continue 2022 with eight publications, followed by an increase to nine in 2023. In 2024, the number of publications dropped to eight, maintained with a further increase throughout the year. The increasing number of publications from 2016 to 2024 suggests a growing recognition of cyberbullying in the workplace as a research topic.

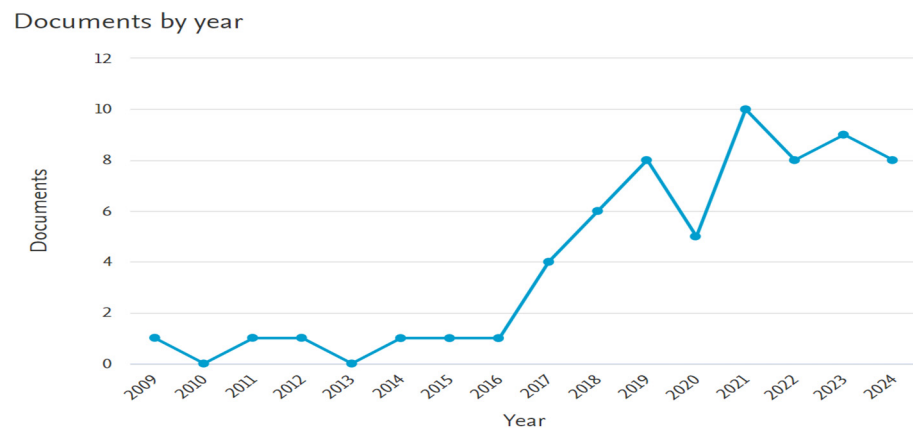


Figure 5. Document publications per year.

4.4. Publication per Year by Source

Figure 6 shows the sources of the publications of 10 different journals. The *International Journal of Human Resources Management* had the highest number of publications, with two in 2017, none in 2018–2019, and then dropped to one publication between 2019 and 2020. The *Computer and Human Behaviour* journal had two publications, one between 2017 and 2018 and the other between 2021 and 2022. The *Journal of Nursing Management* published one publication between 2018 and 2019. *Cyberpsychology, Behaviour, and Social Networking* journals published only one publication between 2020 and 2021.

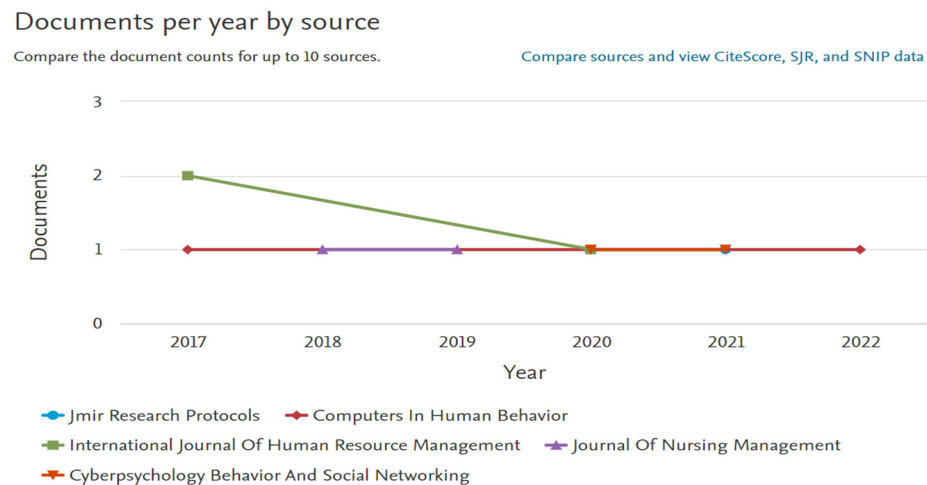


Figure 6. Publication per year by source.

4.5. Keywords and Occurrences in Publications

The visualisation analysis illustrated 20 words, with the top 10 highest having two clusters, as illustrated in Figure 7. In these publications, humans (adults, humans, job satisfaction) and workplace (cyberbullying, workplace, workplace bullying, computer crime, bullying) were common occurrences. In Figure 7, a network visualisation displays the keywords of the frequent authors, each appearing at least ten times. This research utilised VOSviewer, a specialised software for creating and visualising bibliometric networks, to illustrate the connections between author keywords. The diagram uses colour, the size of the circles, the font size, and the line thickness to indicate that the relationships between keywords and those that appear in the same colour are typically interconnected. The keywords “humans” and “adults” share the colour red, indicating that they are frequently associated together. Similarly, “cyberbullying”, “workplace”, “workplace bullying”, “computer crime”, and “bullying” are grouped by the colour green, showing that these concepts are often linked and appear together. Table 3 summarises the keywords most frequently

used in cyberbullying research. It shows that the term ‘cyberbullying’ has the highest association with workplace cyberbullying occurrences, mentioned 27 times. The keywords ‘workplace’ and ‘workplace cyberbullying’ are also commonly seen, each occurring in 20 published works. Additional notable keywords include ‘human’ (17 mentions), ‘bullying’ (13 mentions), ‘humans’ (12 mentions), ‘article’ (9 mentions), ‘workplace bullying’ (8 mentions) ‘adult’ (7 mentions), and ‘computer crime’ (7 mentions). These keywords are organised into two primary clusters. The “human relates aspect” and ‘workplace-related aspects’, depict the interconnectedness of the keywords and occurrences.

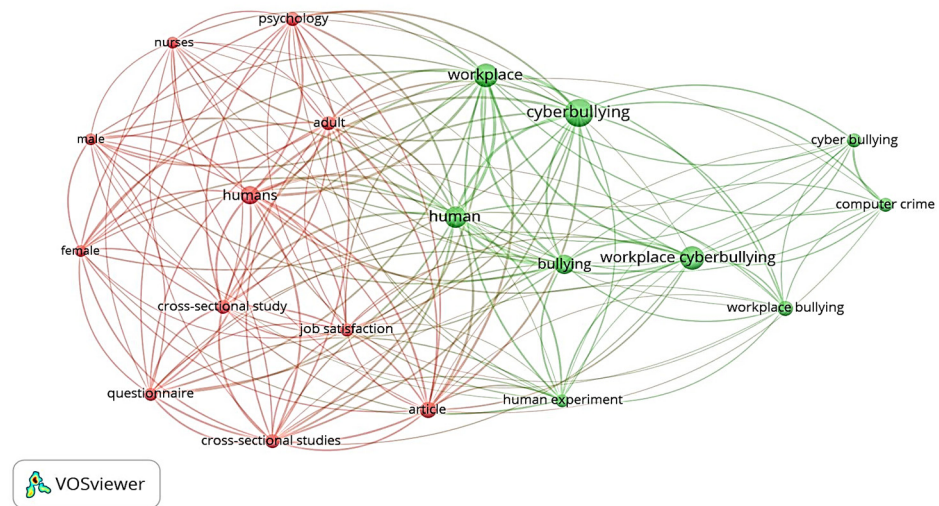


Figure 7. Visualisation.

Table 3. Keywords and occurrences.

Keywords	Occurrences	Total Link Strength
Cyberbullying	27	115
Workplace	20	137
Workplace cyberbullying	20	58
Human	17	132
Bullying	13	82
Humans	12	105
Article	9	84
Workplace bullying	8	31
Adult	7	68
Computer crime	7	26

5. Discussion

Cyberbullying at work is rising globally across different industries and nations, as highlighted by several studies [30,70,71]. According to the Gitnux report on Workplace Cyberbullying Statistics, there was a 57% increase in cyberbullying cases between 2017 and 2022. This issue has become ubiquitous and consequential for businesses and organisations, negatively impacting productivity and spreading rapidly across various sectors and countries, including developing countries [32,72]. Workplace cyberbullying is highly prevalent in developing countries [45], yet research on this topic is still very limited in developing countries. These findings highlight a greater need for research on this topic, especially in Africa, which has been neglected. This difference could be attributed to the greater research opportunities available in developed nations than in developing countries, highlighting how African countries lag in publications on cyberbullying in the workplace. The differences could also be attributed to cyberbullying awareness in developed countries compared to developing African countries, highlighting future research areas. The findings further highlight that both databases underscore the increasing need for research on work-

place cyberbullying concerning digital transformation to foster organisational sustainability, particularly in developing African countries, if they are to compete and survive in the global economy.

Despite the accelerated digital transformation during the COVID-19 outbreak, workplace cyberbullying still lacks the attention to facilitate organisational sustainability effectively, confirmed by Farley et al. [19] and Platts et al. [73], who highlighted that research on workplace cyberbullying within working contexts is embryonic. The findings illustrate these fluctuations in publication rates over the years from 2009 to 2024. The findings highlight the increasing number of publications from 2016 to 2024, suggesting a growing recognition of cyberbullying as a research topic, especially in developed countries. However, in developing countries such as African countries, research is lacking on cyberbullying at work, as demonstrated by the findings of a closer examination where Africa consists of 54 countries, and only 2 African countries contributed to publications on workplace cyberbullying, namely South Africa, which had the highest number of publications (three) [66], and Ghana, which had only one publication. The research gap on cyberbullying in Africa underscores the lag in digital transformation efforts to achieve organisational sustainability on the continent.

Significantly, the findings indicate that despite extensive exploration of cyberbullying in business management, significant gaps persist in the current body of work in the literature, especially in the African context. A notable void involves the limited examination of digital workplaces or online labour markets in the current literature as settings for cyberbullying [14,22]. Despite the prevalence of cyberbullying in the workplace in digital workplace environments, there is a research gap in understanding why this significant and frequent occurrence has not received enough attention, particularly in African workplaces. This study identified two main clusters in the literature on workplace cyberbullying: one focused on human-related aspects such as adults, humans, and job satisfaction, and another focused on workplace-related themes such as cyberbullying, workplace bullying, computer crime, and bullying.

The clusters illustrated the relationship between various human-related aspects and the aspects of workplace cyberbullying. These clusters revealed distinct groups of interconnected research within the field, indicating different perspectives and areas of interest. Cluster analysis sheds light on the network of relationships between humans and the workplace, suggesting potential avenues for future research and highlighting diverse perspectives within the African context. Therefore, the results of this study hold practical importance in tackling cyberbullying at work, specifically by identifying focal points for future research and intervention strategies tailored to African settings. Additionally, understanding the areas that have garnered the most research attention can shed light on underexplored domains, paving the way for further exploration of resources to address workplace cyberbullying in Africa.

6. Conclusions

The main research objective was to introduce an initial bibliographic investigation of cyberbullying in digital workplaces, emphasising the neglect of research on cyberbullying in the African workplace. The findings highlight that researchers in African workplaces have ignored the phenomenon of cyberbullying in the workplace. The findings suggest that while cyberbullying is more prevalent in developing countries, research on the subject is conducted predominantly in developed nations, as only two publications have been carried out by two countries, South Africa and Ghana, which focused on cyberbullying at work. This leaves a gap in developing countries, particularly in Africa, where published studies are lacking. Bridging digital disparities in Africa requires collaborative efforts to reduce the occurrence of cyberbullying in the workplace and mitigate its adverse impacts. Implementing interventions is crucial to foster empathy and improve interpersonal relationships among employees in digital work environments, ultimately promoting organisational sustainability.

There is a need to address the impact and prevention of cybercrime while also considering the mental and social well-being of employees in the workplace in developing countries, especially African countries. Given the evident negative effects of workplace cyberbullying on employees' mental and social health, there is an urgent need to integrate measures to prevent and deal with cybercrimes, including workplace cyberbullying, into these policies, especially in African countries, to promote organisational sustainability. Increasing awareness of existing cyber laws and encouraging employees to report incidents when necessary are essential. Furthermore, it is imperative to shift the focus of research on cyberbullying in the workplace beyond merely understanding its occurrence and prevalence. It causes us to examine its impact on organisational sustainability, especially within the African workplace.

Similar to other studies, this study had technical and methodological limitations. Initially, the authors focused solely on Scopus and Web of Science, overlooking other bibliographic databases such as Science Direct, IEEE Xplore, JSTOR, and ERIC. Furthermore, this study did not include authors, affiliations, citations, or bibliographic coupling analyses. Therefore, future research should address the technical and methodological limitations identified in the current study. Though gender (five) and organisation culture (seven) did not make it to the top ten most used keywords, this highlights the gap in knowledge regarding understanding gender and workplace cyberbullying and organisation culture and workplace cyberbullying [74]. The research recommends that future research explore the relationship between culture and cyberbullying in an African workplace. Loh and Snyman [34] highlight that workplace cyberbullying can be gendered. Therefore, this study recommends that future research be conducted to explore cyberbullying and gender in an African workplace. This research further recommends that future research be conducted to investigate awareness and understanding of cyberbullying in the African workplace.

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