Shamed Online: A Review of Challenges and Legal Responses to Body Shaming as a Form of Cyberbullying

Mohd Zulhelmey Abdullah*, Syatirah Abu Bakar, Salmah Roslim, Nur Irinah Mohamad Sirat, Siti Khadijah Abdullah Sanek, Nurul Mazrah Manshor

Faculty of Law, University Technology MARA Cawangan Kedah, Kampus Sungai Petani, Kedah, Malaysia.

*Correspondence Author

ABSTRACT

Online body shaming has rapidly become a symbol of widespread cyberbullying in digital spaces, disproportionately impacting adolescents and young adults, especially females. Social media and similar platforms amplify appearance-based harassment, leading to a variety of negative psychosocial effects—persistent sadness, increased anxiety, lowered self-esteem, disordered eating, and in severe cases, suicidal thoughts. Despite the gravity of this issue, legal and policy responses are inconsistent and fragmented, often struggling to balance victim protection with freedom of expression. This paper examines the urgent problem of body shaming as cyberbullying by analysing its psychological, regulatory, normative, and technological dimensions. Using Scopus AI Analytics (review date 23 August 2025), this study conducts a thorough assessment of the phenomenon, outlining its prevalence, impacts, legal barriers, and innovative remedial efforts. The outputs include summaries, expanded summaries, conceptual maps, and emerging themes, contributing to interdisciplinary understanding. The analysis shows that body shaming, as a form of cyberbullying, causes long-lasting psychological damage, reinforced by cultural beauty standards and the anonymity afforded by online spaces. Current legal frameworks remain inadequate due to vague definitions, weak enforcement, and cultural resistance. Preventive measures mainly depend on educational and awareness campaigns, yet evidence supporting their effectiveness is limited. Emerging themes highlight technological solutions such as machine learning detection systems, along with a growing recognition of mental health impacts and the identification of body shaming as a distinct form of digital violence. The research advances theoretical knowledge by framing body shaming as a unique subtype of cyberbullying incorporating neurobiological, cultural, and legal factors, and practically by emphasising the need for cohesive legal reforms, psychological support, digital literacy programmes, and technological safeguards. These insights improve academic understanding and offer policymakers, educators, and mental health professionals pathways to develop more effective, evidence-based responses.

Keywords: Body shaming, Cyberbullying, Legal frameworks, Mental health, Digital platforms.

INTRODUCTION

The digital transformation has collectively reconfigured interpersonal interaction but has simultaneously magnified the hazards embedded within such exchanges, foremost among them the phenomenon of cyberbullying. Within the broader spectrum of these behaviours, the targeted denigration of individuals on the basis of body image—body shaming—has solidified itself as one of the most widespread and corrosive variants of online maltreatment, exercising a disproportionate grip upon adolescents and young adults frequenting social media environments (Novotný et al., 2025). Research assessments indicate that more than one-quarter of adolescents report having experienced body shaming in virtual contexts; the consequences of these encounters include severe mental health problems, such as depressive disorders, anxiety syndromes, and psychosomatic afflictions. Empirical evidence further indicates that female-identifying individuals are more vulnerable (Novotný et al., 2025; Chaundy, 2024). Taken collectively, these manifestations illustrate that digitally mediated

body shaming extends beyond violations of communicative propriety and, in fact, constitutes a species of cyberbullying whose repercussions resonate across social, cultural, and legal contexts.

Though researchers and policymakers acknowledge the increasing incidence of cyberbullying, the statutory and regulatory frameworks devised to curtail the phenomenon remain inconsistent and discretionary among various legal systems. Within the United Kingdom, the Protection from Harassment Act 1997 and the Communications Act 2003 have been productively cited in prosecuting online abuse; yet, the absence of a clear statutory definition for "cyberbullying" introduces considerable uncertainty (El Asam & Samara, 2016). In the Malaysian context, body shaming is not a distinct crime, but rather it is addressed through a patchwork of legislation that results in a fragmented and overlapping legal system (Free Malaysia Today, 2020). Parallel inquiries suggest that jurisdictions in Europe, Asia, and North America remain equally hesitant to recalibrate outdated legislative design for an abuse that occurs in the digital realm (Yang & Grinshteyn, 2016; Junke, 2020). Furthermore, the legal tension created between safeguarding expressive freedoms and prohibiting abusive communication further compounds the uncertainty, resulting in an insufficiently responsive surplus for complainants in each case and, in many instances, leaving them without the necessary legislative support.

Existing literature has thoroughly documented the psychological effects of body shaming (Novotný et al., 2025; Chaundy, 2024) and assessed the effectiveness of cyberbullying legislation (El Asam & Samara, 2016; Yang & Grinshteyn, 2016); however, there is a lack of integrative reviews that explicitly position body shaming as a form of cyberbullying within global legal contexts. This gap is exacerbated by ongoing compliance and cultural issues, as illustrated by the Indonesian case, where victims often refrain from taking legal action because they don't fully understand the law and its enforcement, which unintentionally empowers offenders (Puluhulawa & Husain, 2021). Moreover, although technology treatments like automatic content filtering have been suggested (Kaulage et al., 2023), their effectiveness in addressing nuanced types of abuse, such as body shaming, is still largely unassessed.

The review thus addresses a conspicuous gap by critically examining the obstacles posed by, and the legal strategies directed against, body shaming as a distinctive form of cyberbullying. The study aims to analyse this research area by mapping key concepts, evaluating the perspectives of leading scholars and policymakers, and identifying emerging themes in legal and social discourse. This paper interrogates the effectiveness of existing legal frameworks, the interplay between law and culture, and the role of education and technology in prevention. By integrating findings from legal perspectives, psychological investigation, and modalities of digital communication, the study contributes a cross-disciplinary perspective that highlights both the strengths and weaknesses of current approaches.

This paper contributes to the knowledge in three principal dimensions: first, by offering a nuanced reconceptualization of body shaming as a particular subtype of cyberbullying; second, by critically evaluating legal and policy responses across jurisdictions; and third, by identifying future directions for research, policy, and practice. The review unfolding herein is organized as follows. Following this introduction, the literature review surveys existing scholarship on body shaming, cyberbullying, and relevant legal frameworks. The comparative legal analysis then explores regulatory approaches in different jurisdictions. This is followed by a discussion of the effectiveness and shortcomings of these frameworks. The paper concludes with recommendations for policy and legislative reform, highlighting the need for clearer definitions, stronger enforcement mechanisms, and greater integration of educational and technological interventions to address body shaming in the digital age.

METHODS

This study employed a review methodology, with Scopus AI serving as the principal repository of scholarly output. Data collection was conducted on 23 August 2025, to ensure that the review captured the most recent scholarship on the intersection of body shaming, cyberbullying, and legal responses. The following Boolean string was employed to make the search as broad and accurate as possible:

("body shaming" OR "weight stigma" OR "fat shaming" OR "appearance discrimination") AND ("cyberbullying" OR "online harassment" OR "digital bullying" OR "internet abuse") AND ("mental health" OR

"psychological impact" OR "self-esteem" OR "emotional well-being") AND ("social media" OR "internet" OR "online platforms" OR "digital communication").

This present query generated a comprehensive dataset that encompasses law, psychology, education, and digital communication, thereby fulfilling the cross-disciplinary aim of the study. The Scopus AI outputs comprised a summary, expanded summary, concept map, and emerging themes, all of which were reviewed to construct the analytical framework for this article.

The summary and expanded summary furnished an overview of the research landscape, highlighting the prevalence of body shaming on online platforms, its psychological impacts, and the inadequacy of existing legal responses. These summaries guided the narrowing of focus towards body shaming as a specific form of cyberbullying with distinct socio-legal consequences (Novotný et al., 2025; El Asam & Samara, 2016).

The concept map produced by Scopus AI allowed the study to visualise and cluster the central themes. The four main clusters identified for analytical inspection were: (i) psychological impacts of online body shaming, (ii) legal and regulatory frameworks, (iii) cultural and societal dimensions, and (iv) technological and educational intervention. This mapping activity made it easier to visualise how the scholarship is structured and identify overlaps and gaps in the concepts.

Scopus AI's emerging themes brought attention to several novel directions: (i) the growing recognition of body shaming as a form of digital violence, (ii) the conflict between freedom of expression and protection from harm, (iii) the role of automated moderation tools in dealing with harmful speech, and (iv) the importance of legal literacy and educational reforms in fostering digital resilience. These themes were thus incorporated into the synthesis to ensure that the review encompasses both established scholarship and highlights contemporary controversies.

By triangulating findings from various outputs, the study advances its aim to critically analyse the effectiveness of existing legal frameworks, explore the interaction between law and cultural compliance, and evaluate the role of education and technology in prevention. The methodological approach ensures that the article is firmly grounded in the latest scholarship while providing a cross-disciplinary analysis that reflects both the strengths and weaknesses of current approaches to online body shaming.
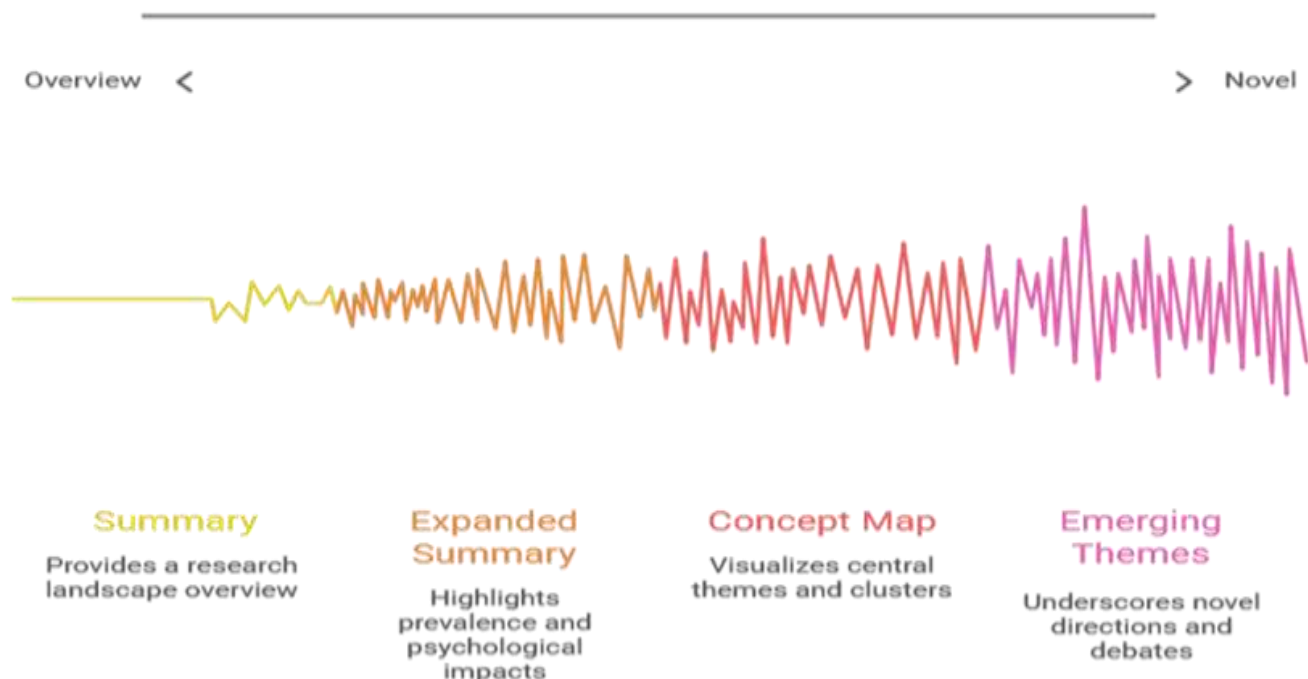

Figure 1. Core elements of Scopus AI

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The Scopus AI analysis (23 August 2025) confirms that body shaming constitutes a pervasive variant of cyberbullying, precipitating profound psychological consequences, including heightened anxiety, clinical depression, and a pronounced erosion of self-worth (Novotný et al., 2025). Both the summary and the expanded summary highlight the insufficiency of present legal frameworks, prompting an exploration that transcends conventional jurisprudential scrutiny. The concept map brackets extant knowledge into four domains: psychological harm, legal challenges, cultural influences, and technological or educational responses. Concurrently, emerging themes highlight the increasing appropriation of body shaming within the context of digital violence, the enduring tension between safeguarding expressive freedom and protection, and the role of AI moderation and digital literacy in preventing such behaviour (El Asam & Samara, 2016; Shariff, 2013; Puluhulawa & Husain, 2021). Together, these findings collectively provide the basis for a critical discussion of the effectiveness and limitations of legal, cultural, and technological responses to online body shaming.

Summary and Expanded Summary

The findings derived from both the Scopus AI Summary and its expanded summary reiterate that online body shaming is a pervasive form of cyberbullying, manifesting severe psychological, social, and legal consequences. Current studies reveal that approximately twenty-five percent of adolescents report exposure to body shaming through social media and similar environments, with affected individuals subsequently displaying elevated indices of depressive symptomatology, anxiety, psychosomatic symptoms, and, in specific instances, substance use as coping mechanisms (Novotný et al., 2025). The psychological toll is notably heightened in female respondents, who encounter intensified body-image scrutiny and normative evaluations of self-worth. As a result, they statistically exhibit diminished assertiveness in interpersonal contexts and lowered satisfaction with bodily appearance (Frisén & Berne, 2020; Olenik-Shemesh & Heiman, 2017). Additional longitudinal analyses establish that adolescent body-shaming exposure is a robust predictive variable for enduring cognitive distortions and an augmented risk of depressive episodes in later stages, indicating a protracted deleterious trajectory (Calvete et al., 2016). Collectively, the empirical evidence compels a reconceptualisation of body shaming as more than transient online "drama," contingency framing; rather, it should be recognised judiciously as a subtype of digital violence that systematically undermines emotional equilibrium and discretionary social development.

Future-focused scholarship on youth advocacy increasingly identifies body shaming within digital ecologies as a multidimensional challenge that demands urgent ethical and professional reflection. As Walker (2016) points out, the absence of standardised definitions for cyberbullying makes it harder to intervene. De Vries (2015) elucidates the proliferating ethical conflicts arising from public shaming protocols on social-media platforms, which often blur the line between accountability and harassment. This aligns with the broader recognition that online environments normalise shaming behaviours under the guise of humour or critique, thereby entrenching harmful cultural narratives. Thus, combating body shaming necessitates not only legal interventions but also ethical awareness and proactive engagement within educational contexts (Shariff, 2013).

The legal dimensions continue to exhibit significant gaps with respect to the governance of appearance-oriented cyber-bullying. While jurisdictions such as China have initiated regulatory pilot programmes that explicitly address the phenomenon (Junke, 2020), prevailing legal frameworks elsewhere are still hampered by ambiguities in definitional scope, persistent difficulties in evidentiary attribution of intention, and jurisdictional challenges (Butler, 2018). The categorisation of body shaming as a quasi-criminal phenomenon is gradually consolidating, a development that has stimulated advocacy for the introduction of restorative justice modalities—especially penal mediation—capable of furnishing swift reparative relief to affected parties (Kaawoan, 2020; Puluhulawa & Husain, 2021). Despite these theoretical advances, the tension between the right to free expression and the impulse to punitive governance remains unresolved, with fears that excessively broad restrictions could unjustifiably abridge fundamental civil liberties predominating in ongoing scholarly and legislative discourse.

Contemporary technological interventions are simultaneously indispensable and inadequately mature. Abuse concerning physical appearance—exacerbated by social media's dual characteristics of anonymity and viral dissemination—requires enhanced platform regulations and tailored health promotion campaigns that transcend

age boundaries (Prince et al., 2024). Currently, most strategies focus on cultivating individual fortitude, overlooking comprehensive structural protections. Even though automated monitoring algorithms are improving, they still cannot distinguish between subtle harassment based on appearance. This lack of analysis, combined with a lack of legal knowledge and a general fear of enforcement in the culture, prompts policymakers to adopt a more comprehensive strategy that includes law changes, technology protections, and educational programs.

In brief, the study confirms that body shaming in online environments constitutes a complicated, diverse social issue. It is strongly ingrained in societal perceptions of body image, sustained by digital technology, and inadequately addressed by fragmented legal frameworks. In this kind of environment, we need more than just one-time fixes; we need coordinated, multi-faceted policy mergers. Therefore, the discussion highlights the need for integrated measures that safeguard free expression, enhance legal literacy, and use both education and technology to help people deal with online body shaming.

Concept Map

The graph drawn by Scopus AI (23 August 2025) presents a visual map of the main ideas and sub-ideas related to body shaming and cyberbullying. The graph shows four important areas: prevention strategies, legal responses, psychological impact, and forms of body shaming. Each of these areas has additional specific subtopics that come from it. For instance, prevention strategies focus on support systems and educational programs, while legal responses emphasise the importance of social media policies and laws addressing cyberbullying. The psychological impact correlates with outcomes such as body-esteem and body image, demonstrating how deeply online harassment influences self-perception. Meanwhile, the forms of body shaming are illustrated through appearance teasing and online body shaming, capturing both direct and indirect manifestations. This graph shows how complicated the problem is and how body shaming as a kind of cyberbullying can't be fixed on its own. It should be examined from all perspectives, including legal, psychological, educational, and technological viewpoints.
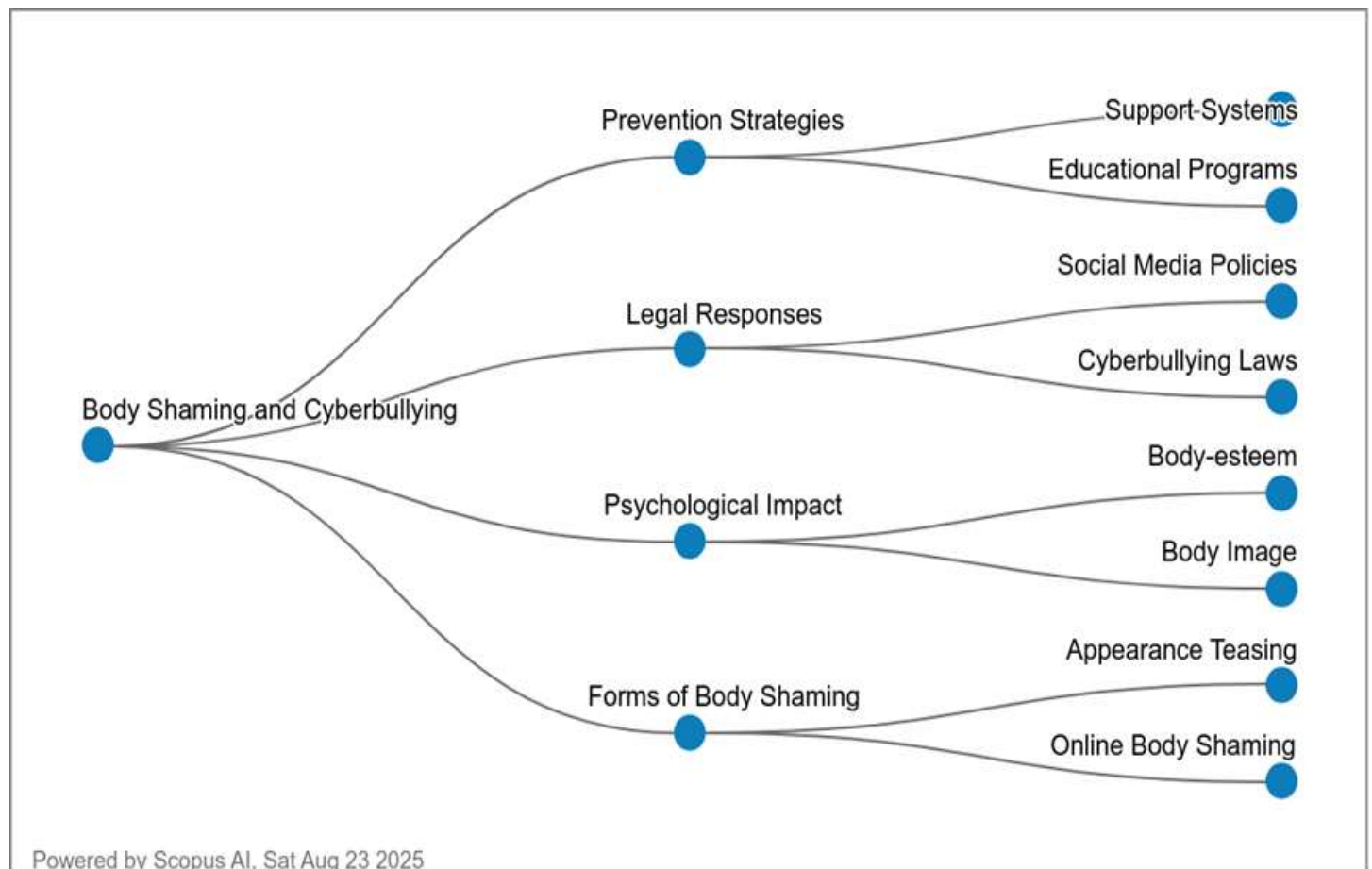

Powered by Scopus AI, Sat Aug 23 2025

Figure 2. Concept map of body shaming and cyberbullying

The Review of Body Shaming and Cyberbullying

Recent studies indicate that body shaming, especially through cyberbullying, represents a widespread problem with considerable psychological and societal ramifications. Studies show that 25% to 45% of adolescents have emotional and cognitive responses to body shaming online. Up to 50% of adolescents also exhibit relational responses that hinder their ability to communicate effectively with others online and in person (Novotný et al., 2025). These experiences are closely associated with symptoms of sadness, anxiety, and tension, underscoring the necessity to regard body shaming as a kind of digital violence rather than inconsequential online interactions. Adolescents are vulnerable to long-term psychological distress because of appearance-based cyberbullying, highlighting its growing significance as a public health and legal concern.

Gender inequalities are also evident in the impact of online body shaming. Females, especially adolescent girls, are disproportionately affected, often reporting higher levels of body dissatisfaction, signs of eating disorders, and maladaptive coping behaviours such as restrictive eating or substance use (Prince et al., 2025). The gendered aspect of cyberbullying illustrates how social pressures, beauty ideals, and body objectification intensify the psychological burden borne by young women. This not only shows how important it is to make gender-sensitive interventions, but it also shows how online platforms amplify existing cultural norms of body surveillance and critique, exacerbating mental health risks for vulnerable populations.

The psychological effects of appearance-related cyberbullying surpass immediate emotional turmoil. Research indicates that appearance-related cyberbullying is significantly associated with heightened body shame, the internalisation of thin ideals, and a need to modify physical appearance among adolescent females (Prince et al., 2024). The development of the Body Image-Related Cyberbullying Neurobiological Model (BRC-NM) elucidates the neurological mechanisms that render teenagers susceptible to body shaming, providing insights into the effects of digital harassment on cognitive and affective processing (Prince et al., 2025). This neurobiological perspective bolsters the assertion that body shaming represents a substantial form of psychological harm, necessitating targeted policy and healthcare measures.

Social factors are also a big part of what happens when someone is bullied online. Studies indicate that strong friendship networks can alleviate the adverse impacts of body shaming, diminish body dissatisfaction and acting as protective buffers against detrimental online interactions (Kenny et al., 2018). Moreover, body satisfaction has been recognised as a protective factor, with research indicating that elevated body satisfaction diminishes the probability of victimisation and bullying behaviour, especially among adolescent males (Malinowska-Cieślik et al., 2022). These findings underscore the significance of fostering resilience and body positivity within comprehensive prevention programs, including legal and technological interventions.

Even with these findings, there are challenges that need to be solved before the law can effectively deal with body shaming as a form of cyberbullying. Most of the time, existing laws don't cover specific aspects of harassment based on appearance, and it's tougher to enforce them due to the need to strike a balance between protecting free speech and controlling damaging information. The findings indicate that educational campaigns and social media policies, although increasingly prioritised, must be integrated with enhanced legal literacy, improved enforcement mechanisms, and context-sensitive rules to achieve efficacy. The convergence of legal, psychological, and sociological viewpoints demonstrates that body shaming is not solely an individual issue but a significant societal dilemma that necessitates comprehensive remedies, including legal reform, preventive initiatives, and cultural transformation.

Prevention Strategies

Educators, policymakers, and mental health professionals are all very concerned about preventing body shaming and cyberbullying since they are harmful to adolescent well-being. Existing literature on cyberbullying prevention emphasises a range of approaches, including anti-bullying policies, cyber safety education, technical solutions, and the promotion of social support networks. However, studies indicate that while these strategies are widely implemented, there is limited evidence of their long-term effectiveness (Perren et al., 2012). The complexity of digital interactions, particularly on social media platforms, makes prevention challenging, as anonymity and the viral nature of online communication amplify the risk of harmful behaviours such as body

shaming.

Prevention strategies are typically established across multiple levels, engaging individuals, families, schools, and broader institutional stakeholders. Ansary (2023) highlights the importance of integrating schools, internet companies, healthcare providers, and policymakers into coordinated preventive frameworks. Awareness campaigns, teacher training, and peer-support programs are all common parts of anti-bullying programs at the school level. Families are also encouraged to foster open communication with their adolescents to reduce secrecy surrounding online activities and to strengthen their resilience. Despite these initiatives, much of the existing evidence suggests that strategies remain fragmented and reactive, often responding to incidents instead of preventing them proactively (Tozzo et al., 2022).

The psychological effects of body shaming provide an additional justification for robust preventive measures. Adolescents subjected to appearance-related cyberbullying often experience adverse effects, including diminished body esteem, heightened body dissatisfaction, and maladaptive eating behaviours (Novotný et al., 2025; Prince et al., 2024). Girls are particularly sensitive, and appearance-related cyberbullying is significantly associated with eating disorders and body shame (Schlüter et al., 2023). These results show that body image education and health promotion initiatives need to be part of strategies to stop cyberbullying. Preventive interventions can help keep people from becoming cyber victims by focusing on improving body satisfaction and resilience.

People are starting to realise that technology may play a larger role in prevention tactics, in addition to educational programs. Some studies suggest that social media legislation should be established to promote responsible digital citizenship and utilise AI-driven technology to identify and remove harmful content (Perren et al., 2012; Ansary, 2023). However, concerns persist regarding the effectiveness and ethical implications of these measures, particularly in striking a balance between the need for regulation and the protection of freedom of expression. This suggests that technology-based interventions should complement, rather than replace, school and family-based approaches, ensuring that adolescents are supported in both digital and real-life environments.

Overall, the literature indicates that solutions for preventing body shaming and cyberbullying should be comprehensive, collaborative, and evidence-based. Although present initiatives predominantly emphasise education and awareness, there exists an immediate necessity for measures that include psychological assistance, digital literacy, and legal frameworks. The limited success of existing approaches underscores the need for further research to develop targeted, culturally sensitive, and scalable interventions. Ultimately, effective prevention will require coordinated action among schools, families, governments, policymakers, and technology companies to mitigate the risks of body shaming and make the internet, as well as digital spaces, a safer place for adolescents.

Legal Responses

The legal dimension of body shaming as a manifestation of cyberbullying constitutes a significant difficulty in digital governance. Studies repeatedly show that online body shaming has a bigger impact on adolescents, especially females. This is linked to body dissatisfaction, eating disorder symptoms, and low self-esteem (Novotný et al., 2025; Prince et al., 2024). The severity of these harms emphasises the immediate necessity for explicit legislative safeguards. However, existing laws often fail to adequately address the complex dynamics of appearance-related harassment, and in certain countries, the absence of specific legal frameworks results in inadequate protection for victims (Frisén & Berne, 2020). This legal vacuum makes the mental effects of body shaming worse, which shows how important it is to make changes that are specific to digital abuse.

Legal reactions are influenced by the content of the law as well as cultural attitudes and the behaviour of the victim. Puluhulawa and Husain (2021) contend that in Indonesia, a fragile legal culture and insufficient victim participation in the court system facilitate the continuation of body shaming. Even when legal options are available, victims may not report due to shame, fear of revenge, or a lack of trust in law enforcement. This highlights a broader societal issue. Law may exist on paper, but without social legitimacy and cultural alignment, its effectiveness remains limited. The dilemma is exacerbated by the fact that online communication transcends

national borders, complicating the determination of who is legally responsible. In Malaysia, currently, laws related to body shaming and cyberbullying are under the Communication and Multimedia Act 1998 and the Defamation Act 1957. However, there is no specific statutory definition of cyberbullying in the existing legal framework (The Sun Daily, 2024).

Comparative studies indicate that, although several jurisdictions, including parts of the United States and Europe, have enacted laws against cyberbullying, enforcement remains inconsistent (Yang & Grinshteyn, 2016). These laws often struggle to strike a balance between protecting victims and upholding free speech. For instance, making too many things illegal could violate free expression, while making too few things illegal could leave many victims without a way to get justice. This conflict reflects a fundamental dilemma in digital governance: how to regulate harmful online behaviour without stifling legitimate discourse. Thus, preventative legal actions against body shaming should find a balance between the right to free speech and the cultural environment.

The relation between cyberbullying, mental health, and the law shows how important it is to have good rules. Body shaming and harassment based on appearance have been associated with depression, suicidal ideation, and, in severe instances, suicidal behaviours (Chaundy, 2024). These consequences render body shaming not merely a social concern, but a significant matter of public health and human rights. However, judicial institutions are typically more reactive than proactive, only addressing harm after it has occurred. This reactionary approach puts victims in a lot of danger, which shows how important it is to have laws that focus on prevention, early intervention, and victim care instead of just punishment.

Overall, the review highlights significant gaps in legal responses to body shaming when it is called cyberbullying. Persistent obstacles include unclear definitions, cultural resistance to legal enforcement, victim reluctance to come forward, and the balance between freedom of speech and protection. Moving forward, comprehensive approaches are needed that combine legislative reform with educational initiatives, technological interventions, and support systems for victims. Such holistic approaches would ensure that laws are not only enacted but also effectively implemented and culturally accepted. This multifaceted approach is the only way that legal systems can fully protect people from the mental and social damage that body shaming may do in digital environments.

Psychological Impact

Body shaming as a kind of cyberbullying has significant psychological effects, particularly on adolescents, who are more likely to be exposed to harmful online environments. The study indicates that appearance-related cyberbullying mostly targets body shape and size, with adolescent females being the most common victims. Appearance-related cyberbullying-victimisation has been shown to have a positive relationship with body shame, eating disorder symptoms, and body dissatisfaction, while negatively correlating with body esteem and body appreciation (Prince et al., 2024). These findings underscore that body shaming impacts not just immediate emotional well-being but also fosters enduring vulnerabilities associated with identity, self-esteem, and health behaviours.

It has been demonstrated that online body shaming can elicit a diverse array of detrimental behaviours, relational dynamics, and cognitive-emotional reactions. Individuals who are harassed like this often have symptoms of melancholy and anxiety, psychosomatic issues, and even bad coping techniques like drug usage (Novotný et al., 2025). These adverse outcomes happen more often in adolescent girls than in adolescent boys because girls are more likely to take comments about their looks personally. This suggests that body shaming functions as a type of targeted gendered abuse, leveraging socially imposed beauty standards and exacerbating adolescent concerns during critical developmental periods.

Body shaming not only harms individuals but also has a negative impact on society as a whole and on mental health. Studies corroborate that persistent exposure to appearance-related cyberbullying diminishes self-esteem and life happiness, engendering feelings of alienation and diminished body confidence (Cherian & Mukherjee, 2022). This "vicious loop" not only hurts the victims' health, but it also keeps the loops of online animosity going, as those who are body shamed may also bully or project themselves. This shows how cyberbullying affects relationships, since the harm goes beyond just the victims and into societal dynamics, making toxic online

cultures stronger.

Researchers have recently sought to comprehend the neurological foundations of adolescents' reactions to body shaming. The Body Image-Related Cyberbullying Neurobiological Model (BRC-NM) proposes that cyberbullying activates brain mechanisms that increase emotional vulnerability among adolescent females (Prince et al., 2025). This model advances the field by illustrating that body shaming is not merely a social or psychological concern, but also one with measurable neurological implications. These findings support the need for early interventions aimed at both cognitive and biological pathways to prevent the escalation of harm.

Finally, the study indicates that body image dissatisfaction is directly and indirectly associated with cyberbullying perpetration, mediated through depression (Balta et al., 2020). This connection suggests that individuals who have experienced body shaming may become perpetrators, which shows how harm may happen repeatedly in digital spaces. The intersection of individual vulnerabilities, psychopathological factors, and peer dynamics illustrates the complexity of psychological impacts associated with body shaming. These findings underscore the necessity for comprehensive solutions that integrate psychological support, resilience-building techniques, and preventive measures to combat the pervasive consequences of body shaming as a type of cyberbullying.

Forms of Body Shaming

Body shaming is a unique form of cyberbullying that occurs in many situations when people make negative comments about someone's looks. Predominantly, online body shaming constitutes the most prevalent form, with recent research revealing that roughly twenty-five percent of adolescents experience such humiliation (Novotný et al., 2025). Digital platforms enable offenders to target specific aspects of a person's body, online presence, or appearance. These conflicts lead to disturbances in social networks and the emergence of psychosomatic effects, including increased anxiety, depressive disorders, and psychosomatic conditions resulting from the prevailing mental health disturbance. Female adolescents demonstrate significant vulnerability, frequently revealing increased stress, maladaptive coping mechanisms, and substance use.

An equally important aspect of body shaming is that it encompasses a wide range of definitions. Schlüter et al. (2023) characterise the phrase as encompassing unsolicited, primarily unfavourable remarks regarding an individual's physique, varying from ostensibly "well-intentioned" advice to overtly malicious insults. This definition shows how hard it is to tell the difference between body-related comments that are accepted in some cultures and damaging harassment. Repetition, especially on digital platforms, can turn comments intended to be humorous into bullying. This viewpoint emphasises that even casual, informal deviances such as a seemingly innocuous concern about calorie consumption or a momentary disparagement of lower abdominal or hip size contribute to a persistent and cumulatively reinforcing system of humiliation. This, in turn, solidifies a broader norm of disconnection from the body, which may foster a larger culture of shaming that exacerbates body dissatisfaction and mental health risks.

Cherian and Mukherjee's (2022) work on the "vicious loop" of body shaming highlights the severe psychological effects of this type of body shaming. Individuals who hear hurtful comments typically internalise them too soon, which lowers their self-esteem and makes them either criticise their own body or expect and do more shaming. The role of social media is to make these effects worse by showing idealised body images that support detrimental norms, which makes the psychological burden even worse. Consequently, body shaming transforms from a singular act of aggression into a complex system where negative body image and mediated monitoring intensify each other, resulting in significant and cumulative psychological distress for the victim.

In addition to digital environments, body stigmatisation is influenced by legal and cultural considerations. Puluhulawa and Husain (2021) demonstrate that the interplay between legal culture and enforcement affects the persistence of the phenomenon in particular countries. When laws are unclear, enforcement is insufficient, or when legislative texts fail to resonate with people's culture, those who want to complain have numerous reasons not to go to court, which gives the perpetrators greater authority. The authors assert that lasting redress relies not solely on stricter normative frameworks or predominantly on heightened punitive measures, but rather on public

awareness initiatives aimed at altering cultural perceptions surrounding body critique. This perspective places the denunciation and prevention of body shaming beyond the scope of singular modification tactics, hence requiring simultaneous reform of legislation and cultural initiatives.

Lastly, body shaming based on weight is a unique type that has very harmful effects. Cerolini et al. (2024) demonstrate a significant correlation between weight bias, internalised weight stigma, and body dissatisfaction, indicating their role as antecedents to eating disorders in teenagers. This type of body shaming not only harms mental health but also results in disordered eating practices, especially in girls. This underscores the intersection of body shaming with broader concerns of weight discrimination and media-influenced norms, exacerbating socioeconomic disparities. These studies collectively illustrate that body shaming manifests in diverse forms—online, offline, legal-cultural, and weight-related—each with profound psychological repercussions necessitating targeted treatments and remedies.

Emerging Themes

A consistent theme in the research is the utilisation of machine learning and artificial intelligence for the identification of cyberbullying behaviours, particularly focusing on instances of body shaming. Researchers have continually focused on developing algorithms that can analyse textual, visual, image, and multimodal data to identify hazardous content on social media platforms (Kaulage et al., 2023). Due to the size and speed of online communication, these types of technology interventions are becoming increasingly important for prevention and early intervention. The persistent rise of this issue suggests that manual monitoring is insufficient and that automated detection, when integrated with human oversight, can substantially enhance digital safety infrastructures (Ghosh et al., 2025). Nonetheless, difficulties persist in ensuring that these systems account for cultural variations, contextual interpretations, and the balance between regulation and freedom of expression, underscoring the need for ongoing refinement of algorithmic methodologies.

The rising theme in this study increasingly focuses on the psychological consequences of body shaming and cyberbullying conducted via internet media. An increasing amount of evidence shows that teens who are bullied online about their appearance are more likely to suffer from long-term depression, persistent anxiety, psychosomatic symptoms, and low self-esteem (Novotný et al., 2025). Women are especially susceptible, since body shaming can result in unhealthy ways of coping, eating disorders, and enduring unhappiness with body image (Prince et al., 2024). This growing trend in research shows that people are starting to realise that cyberbullying is not just a social or legal problem, but also a major public health problem. The heightened emphasis on psychological outcomes indicates a shift towards holistic prevention and intervention frameworks that prioritise mental health assistance, resilience enhancement, and the integration of psychological services within school and community settings.

Lastly, a novel theme in the literature is the explicit focus on body shaming that happens online. Historically, cyberbullying research has concentrated on generic types of online harassment; however, new studies increasingly emphasise body shaming as a distinct and particularly harmful subtype. This study investigates the correlation between online body shaming and several consequences, including body dissatisfaction, exacerbated disordered eating symptoms, and heightened suicidal ideation (Cerolini et al., 2024; Cherian & Mukherjee, 2022). The novelty of this theme resides in its acknowledgement of body shaming as not only a component of cyberbullying but as an independent phenomenon requiring targeted legal, cultural, and psychological measures. Researchers contend that online body shaming is exacerbated by normative beauty standards promoted through media portrayals, rendering it both a cultural and digital offence (Schlüter et al., 2023). Recognising this theme signifies that policymakers, educators, and mental health experts must transcend generic cyberbullying solutions and devise strategies particularly addressing the mechanics of body-centric harassment.

When viewed together, these themes indicate that research is shifting in a new direction, incorporating emerging technologies, increased mental health awareness, and greater social and legal recognition. The steady growth of machine learning detection indicates that people continue to rely on digital solutions. The increased emphasis on psychological impacts indicates a growing awareness of victim vulnerability, while the emerging focus on body shaming in online environments reflects an understanding of the distinct damages associated with appearance-

based harassment. These new themes all point to the need for integrated measures that use technology, mental health services, and legal changes to deal with the many problems that body shaming on digital platforms causes.

CONCLUSION

This study elucidates the complex phenomena of body shaming within the overarching framework of cyberbullying, examining its prevalence, psychological effects, deficiencies in current legislation, and the growing strategies for prevention and intervention. One of the most important things to learn is that it has a bigger effect on adolescents, especially girls, who suffer from serious mental health problems like major depressive episodes, increased anxiety, lower self-esteem, and the early onset of disordered eating behaviours (Novotný et al., 2025; Prince et al., 2024). Despite growing evidence, legal frameworks remain inconsistent, with several jurisdictions struggling to balance the importance of free expression with the necessity of protecting individuals from identifiable harm (Puluhulawa & Husain, 2021; Yang & Grinshteyn, 2016). Meanwhile, preventive frameworks are emerging through a combination of educational programs, family involvement, technological interventions, and policy measures, yet evidence of their long-term effectiveness remains limited (Perren et al., 2012; Tozzo et al., 2022). Equally, the review importantly identifies emerging themes—the consistent reliance on AI-driven detection, the rising attention to psychological harms, and the novel focus on body shaming as a distinct phenomenon—signalling a maturing research agenda.

Theoretically, this study advances research in cyberbullying by identifying body shaming as a constitutive yet distinct subtype of digital aggression, one that accommodates prevailing cultural scripts, normative gender performances, and circulating ideologies of the desirable body. The inclusion of neurobiological models (Prince et al., 2025), expands existing theoretical frameworks by integrating cognitive and biological dimensions of victimisation, enriching our understanding of how cyberbullying impacts adolescents. The practical implications are equally significant: policymakers must strengthen legal frameworks that explicitly address appearance-based harassment, educators should incorporate digital citizenship and body positivity into curricula, and technology companies must refine machine learning systems to detect and mitigate harmful online behaviours while safeguarding free expression. Practitioners in mental health play an important role by developing targeted interventions that address the unique psychological vulnerabilities associated with the body.

Although these contributions represent a significant advancement, noteworthy limitations within the existing body of literature warrant critical attention. Initially, empirical studies of body shaming predominantly concentrated in Western jurisdictions, yielding insufficient cross-cultural perspectives where legal and socio-cultural norms may differ. Furthermore, while AI and machine learning detection tools are promising, research is still in its infancy regarding their ethical implications, accuracy across languages, and ability to contextualise harmful speech. Finally, much of the evidence related to preventive interventions exhibits fragmentation, and there are few long-term studies evaluating their sustained effectiveness. Collectively, these constraints underscore the urgent need for a more diverse and globally inclusive research program that crosses disciplinary, geographic, and contextual boundaries.

Moving forward, future research must pursue at least four systematic extensions. First, comparative legal analyses across jurisdictions would facilitate the identification of best practices and guide the formulation of harmonised international standards for addressing cyberbullying and body shaming. Second, longitudinal and experimental research are necessary to investigate the enduring psychological consequences of body shaming, along with the efficacy of prevention and intervention initiatives. Third, research should investigate the intersectionality of body shaming, including its interaction with variables such as gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and disability. Finally, we should pay more attention to figuring out how well and ethically technology interventions work. For example, we need to make sure that AI-driven detection systems don't reinforce biases or limit speech that is legal.

In conclusion, body shaming in digital environments is not just a social problem; it is a serious problem that concerns mental health, legal protection, and digital ethics. To fully resolve the problem, we need to collaborate on theoretical clarification, empirical intervention, policy-making, and technological innovation. Stakeholders can better safeguard vulnerable groups and make the internet safer and more welcoming by strengthening legal

frameworks, improving psychological assistance, building digital resilience, and improving technology solutions.

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