a) Introduction (235 words)

There is an adage, “Action speaks louder than words” and simultaneously, “Word hurts more than action”. Just one simple sentence is enough to kill someone. Why do words hurt so much? Scars and wounds heal. Feelings – not so much. Research shows that negative words release stress and anxiety-inducing hormones in subjects (BRM, 2019). There is a significant number of cases of depression due to online bullying in Singapore. 1 in 3 people (30.6%) aged between 15 and 35 years in Singapore reported experiencing extremely severe symptoms of depression, anxiety, and/or stress due to cyberbullying (National Healthcare Group, 2024). Cyberbullying is a catastrophic problem in Singapore. There is a 98% internet penetration in Singapore (International Trade Administration, 2022), meaning almost everyone can access the internet. Nowadays, tearing apart one’s life can be done with just a keyboard.

The premise of this calamity can be assessed in two interpretative layers of the socio-ecological model – policy and interpersonal. At policy level, the Protection from Harassment Act (POHA) is arguably ineffective which leads to the ramifications of unwavering cyberbullying. Fast enhancement of technology also accounts for the ineffectiveness of the policies as they cannot keep up with the ever-changing conditions. At an interpersonal level, family environments and peer norms sustain the existence of cyberbullying by disguising it as a “joke”, creating a vicious cycle.

This paper thoroughly analyses general courtesy, case studies, and legislative acts to examine comprehension factors and make sense of how they affect cyberbullying.

b) Explanation of reasons/factors using the Socio-ecological model (747 words)

Singapore's cyberbullying is not merely an online issue; it is a reflection of interpersonal dynamics, particularly between peer groups and family members. In a society marked by academic pressure, high parental expectations, and digital connectivity, cyberbullying has emerged as a significant public health concern, often linked to mental health challenges such as anxiety, depression, and even suicidal ideation (Kowalski et al., 2014; Selkie et al., 2015). Children constantly exposed to parental conflict tend to internalise aggression, making them more susceptible to getting bullied or engaging in acts of bullying. (Ong et al., 2021). Anxiety and low self-esteem as a result of poor parental attachment, exacerbates these risks (Ang & Goh, 2010). In Singapore, where academic expectations and emotional neglect are prevalent, adolescents may turn to online aggression as a means of coping or seeking validation (Lim & Ang, 2019). This behavior, however, contributes to exacerbating mental health issues, such as depression and anxiety, in affected individuals (Selkie et al., 2015). Parenting styles inevitably impact a child’s behavior online. The likelihood of cyberbullying is increased when parents

engage in authoritarian-style discipline which can falsely teach children to equate control with aggression (Lim & Ang, 2019). On the flip side of the coin, children are more likely to engage in detrimental online behaviour in the absence of parental supervision, leading to the lack of development of a moral framework (Tan et al., 2024). The use of digital platforms is inevitably becoming increasingly integral to social life, many parents struggle to monitor their children's activity online, further exacerbating the already prevalent problem (Tan et al., 2024). Peer dynamics also play a crucial role in normalising cyberbullying. Adolescents may engage in online aggression to gain peer acceptance or avoid victimisation (Ong et al., 2021). Digital anonymity further emboldens them, reducing accountability (Kowalski et al., 2014). From a public health perspective, cyberbullying is linked to rising anxiety, depression, and suicidal ideation, contributing to the overall mental health crisis in Singapore (Selkie et al., 2015). Victims often face social withdrawal and academic struggles, prompting government and school interventions (Kowalski et al., 2014).

At the policy level of the Socio-Ecological Model, enforcement difficulties posed by the rapidly evolving cyber landscape and increasing technological complexities present a significant challenge to effectively curbing cyberbullying in Singapore. With the rise of Generative Artificial Intelligence (AI), it introduces previously unforeseen problems such as the automatic creation of harassing and threatening media content like hate speech and deep fakes on various online platforms and its rapid dissemination. One can compile personal information and cyberstalk, while maintaining anonymity (Hinduja, 2023). This makes it challenging to trace perpetrators - widening enforcement gaps in policies like Protection from Harassment Act (POHA) and the Code of Practice for Online Safety exist. AI moderation tools, while helpful, struggle to detect context-dependent harm like subtle bullying using coded language. In 2024, The Straits Times reported that scams using deepfake nude images in Singapore hit a record high of over 46000 cases, leading to $651.8 million losses (Cabael, 2024). Such cases highlight that law enforcement can be hindered by AI anonymity. This exacerbates the ability to perform cross-border cyberbullying - requiring international cooperation for enforcement. Meanwhile, the fast-paced development of technology causes cyberbullying tactics to evolve faster than regulations can adapt. The time lag between policy introduction and full enforcement worsens this. Moreover, legal uncertainties (Ong, Ng, 2023) and vague cyberbullying definitions (Fong, 2024) can lengthen legal proceedings, in which damage to victims' mental health, reputation and relationships cannot be undone. For instance, POHA primarily addresses general harassment but does not explicitly criminalise creation/distribution of deepfake content with the intent to harm/defame individuals, causing a legal gray area which is difficult for timely recourse (Protection from Harassment Act 2014). Such time lags are further aggravated by the top-down regulatory approach of these policies. A participatory, bottom-up approach could be more effective in bringing speedier relief to victims rather than invoking lengthy court proceedings to seek reprieve. In contrast, the Australia's Online Safety Act, allows individuals to report instances of online harm through an eSafety-Commissioner-operated system (eSafetyCommissioner, 2024). A new Singapore agency for combatting online harms replicates this, but its recent implementation further highlights this time lag in legislation measures (MDDI, 2024). As such, it can be clearly seen that the pervasive effect of AI greatly hampers

cyberbullying policy enforcement, where time lags between enforcement and establishment further amplifies the legislation gaps. Instead of implementing reactive legislation, the Singapore government should turn towards proactive legislation to counter these gaps.

c) Conclusion (84 words)

To sum up everything that was stated so far, the main reason for growing cases of cyberbullying is due to the rise of technology that complexises the existing preventive measures. Furthermore, standardized stigmas and dismissal of valid concerns at the interpersonal level also strengthen the existence of the matter. Cyberbullying has been ongoing and rising for a long time. For it to subside, it would require a long time. With that, everyone should start being mindful and considerate of what they say online.

Total word count: 1066

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Task 2 Brainstorming

Task 2 Summary Table

Group	Reason	Layer in the SEM
Group 2	● linked to the social environment surrounding youths ● includes both **peer dynamics** and **parental influence**. ● Social standing and peer influence in school environments further worsen this trend. ● mismanagement of conflicts and poor emotional support	Interpersonal
	● high stress environment for teachers and uncooperative parents diminishes policy's impact ● over-reliance on teachers and parents ● teachers lack the mental and physical ability to properly handle the issue ● misunderstandings between schools and parents may trigger inappropriate behaviours online	Institutional
Group 3	● Low self-esteem ● Lack of confidence in their abilities and identity, and feelings of inadequacy ● Low esteem increases likelihood of engaging in cyberbullying (social association theory) ● Weaker social connections with others and are less likely to adhere to social norms, therefore prone to aggressiveness ● Aggressive behaviour as it makes them feel more powerful and boost their self-esteem ● Struggle with fundamental social skills, difficulty appropriately expressing anger ● Technology as a means to retaliate or release frustrations while avoiding accountability ● Highly competitive education system contributing to stress (Mix of community factors), high expectations, feel incompetent during tests due to challenging papers, (therefore lower self esteem?)	Individual
	• Anonymity reduces personal accountability and normalises aggressive behaviour in online spaces • Emboldened to harass others without facing real-world consequences • Perceived anonymity positively correlated with cyber aggression as it weakens the moral and social constraints that typically regulate behaviour	Institutional

	● Confession pages enabling users to target individuals with defamatory remarks under 'opinion sharing' ● Cyberbullies do not witness the harm they inflict and interpret the situation by minimising impact of behaviour → Feel less guilty	
Group 4	• Toxic online communities in Singapore due to the growing usage of digital spaces • Affluence → ownership of tech devices • Online communities promoting cyberbullying • Prominence of western media → influence • Fixation to gain online clout • Cultural importation desensitizes users to harm	Community
	• Lack of robust regulations to prevent minors • Self-reported age verification by individual social media platforms are easily circumvented • Early exposure to unmoderated online spaces increases cyberbullying • Some policies do not take effect after the harm is done • Reactive rather than preventive nature • No singular regulatory body to specifically address cyberbullying prevention → lack of clear jurisdiction • Anonymous accounts or overseas platforms to evade detection	Policy

Task 2 Outline: Evaluating Interpersonal Factors as the Most Significant Reason for Cyberbullying in Singapore Using the Socio-Ecological Model

I. Introduction

Overview of Cyberbullying in Singapore

- Increasing prevalence due to widespread digital access and societal pressures.
- The Socio-Ecological Model (SEM) helps analyze contributing factors.

Thesis Statement: Among the various factors, interpersonal influences (peer and parental dynamics) are the most significant, as they directly shape youth behavior, normalize cyberbullying, and weaken intervention efforts at other levels.

II. Individual Discussion of Each Group's Factors

Group 2: Interpersonal & Institutional Layers

- Interpersonal (Peer & Parental Influence – Most Significant Factor)
    - Peer dynamics normalize cyberbullying (cliques, social dominance).

    - Parental neglect or overreaction can worsen the situation.
- Institutional (School Policies & Teacher Burnout – Secondary Factor)
    - Schools rely too much on teachers and parents, reducing effectiveness.
    - Teacher workload prevents meaningful intervention.

Group 3: Individual & Community Layers

- Individual (Low Self-Esteem – Influenced by Interpersonal Factors)
    - Low self-esteem contributes to cyberbullying but is often shaped by interpersonal experiences (bullying, lack of parental support).
- Community (Anonymity on Social Media – Facilitator, Not Root Cause)
    - Anonymity emboldens cyberbullying but doesn't create it—peer norms and social pressures play a larger role.

Group 4: Community & Policy Layers

- Community (Toxic Online Communities – Reinforces, But Doesn't Cause Cyberbullying)
    - Toxic online spaces exacerbate cyberbullying but do not fundamentally cause it.
- Policy (Gaps in Regulation – Response, Not Root Cause)
    - Weak policies fail to prevent cyberbullying but do not directly drive individuals to engage in it.

III. Justification for Peer Influence as the Most Significant

A. Direct Influence on Cyberbullying Behavior

- Peer pressure and social hierarchies create an environment where cyberbullying is normalized.
- ~~Parental neglect or improper intervention leaves victims and perpetrators without guidance.~~

B. Root Cause of Other Factors in the SEM

- Individual: Poor peer interactions and lack of emotional support lower self-esteem, increasing cyberbullying tendencies.
- Community: Youths engage in toxic online communities because of existing peer norms encouraging such behavior.
- Institutional: School policies fail because they rely too much on parents and teachers, who may not provide adequate support.
- Policy: Even with strict laws, cyberbullying persists if peer dynamics encourage it.

C. Example of Peer Influence in Other Contexts

- In highly competitive cultures (e.g., Japan, South Korea), peer norms contribute to cyberbullying even with strict policies.
- Singapore's emphasis on academic success heightens social pressures, reinforcing cyberbullying behaviors among students.

IV. Conclusion

- Restate Argument: Interpersonal factors are the most critical cause of cyberbullying, as they shape youth behaviors, normalize online aggression, and weaken intervention at other levels.
- Final Thought: Addressing cyberbullying requires changing peer norms and strengthening parental support, alongside institutional and policy changes.

Person 1: Introduction + Conclusion
Person 2 and 3: Comparisons of Group 2, 3, 4
Person 4 and 5: Justifications A, B, C

DRAFT 2

Peer pressure, the need for acceptance, and fear of exclusion often drive cyberbullying, especially in socially stratified environments where reputations can be easily damaged online (Hinduja & Patchin, 2019). Among all contributing factors, peer influence is the most significant as its direct impact on individuals and its ripple effects across other levels of society normalises cyberbullying, and weakens intervention efforts.

At the individual level, negative peer interactions, such as bullying or exclusion, undermine self-esteem. This often pushes individuals to seek validation or regain control through online aggression (Wong et al., 2018). Within peer groups, exposure to toxic norms fosters a culture that normalizes cyberbullying. Youths who grow up in these environments are more likely to adopt similar behaviours online, reinforcing harmful group dynamics. While parenting styles undeniably affect children's development, authoritarian parenting or emotional neglect may lead to aggression or low self-esteem (Group 1) which are often amplified by peers. In fact, many Singaporean youths hide cyberbullying incidents from parents for fear of punishment or dismissal. Thus, even if parents instill moral values, peer approval often overrides them, making peer influence the more decisive factor in determining online behaviour.

Individual characteristics such as low self-esteem, aggression, or lack of social skills (Group 3) can predispose youths to cyberbully, especially under stress from Singapore's competitive academic system. However, these traits alone rarely result in cyberbullying unless peer dynamics support such behavior. Research shows that adolescents are more likely to engage in cyberbullying if their peers do (Hinduja & Patchin, 2013). Peer groups also provide social validation that encourages harmful online actions. This suggests that individual tendencies, though important, require social reinforcement to manifest—making peer influence the more significant factor.

Even institutional efforts to tackle cyberbullying are hindered when peer tensions spill into classrooms, reducing the effectiveness of teachers and school policies. Group 2 and Group 3 pointed out that overworked teachers and disengaged parents limit institutional capacity. Teachers may not have the time or training to monitor digital behavior (DeSmet et al., 2015). Peer groups, on the other hand, are embedded in students' everyday lives and can respond to cyberbullying in real time. Singapore's peer support leader programs reflect this, empowering students to detect and counter online harm effectively. A victim once noted that teachers' failure

to act led him to seek support from a new group of friends, highlighting how peer support succeeded where institutional response fell short.

Peer influence is also powerful in shaping perceptions of what is acceptable. In some groups, This creates an environment where aggressive behaviour is rewarded rather than condemned. The pressure to conform, driven by the desire to maintain social standing, can lead individuals to participate in cyberbullying even if they personally disagree (Hinduja & Patchin, 2013). Over time, this fosters a cycle where empathy is dulled and harmful behaviour is reinforced. While toxic online communities and imported cultural values from Western media promote confrontational styles (Group 4), peer groups serve as the gateway. Adolescents often join harmful online spaces because their friends do. Moreover, their interpretation of external media is shaped by peer responses. Hence, peer groups remain the filter and amplifier of these broader influences.

On a broader scale, legal frameworks cannot directly address the interpersonal roots of the issue. Policies like the Protection from Harassment Act (POHA) face challenges in enforcement, especially with the rise of AI-generated content and anonymous accounts (Group 1 & Group 4). Deepfakes, scams, and coded language are difficult to moderate with current legal tools. But even in these grey areas, it is peer norms that influence whether individuals exploit such technologies. If one's friends condemn cyberbullying, one is less likely to use anonymity to cause harm. In contrast, if peers frame it as humorous, it becomes more acceptable. Thus, while policies are reactive and face implementation lags, peer influence operates in real time and at the source.

A clear example of the power of peer dynamics can be seen in Finland's KiVa programme, which successfully reduced cyberbullying by shifting peer group norms (Williford et al., 2013). By training students to recognise, report, and challenge harmful behaviour, the programme leverages peer disapproval as a deterrent. This demonstrates that when peer influence is guided positively, it becomes a powerful prevention tool. Singapore can draw from this model by implementing peer-led interventions and encouraging bystanders. Strengthening peer support systems within schools can shift social dynamics and prevent cyberbullying before it escalates, addressing the issue at its root rather than relying solely on external regulation.

To sum it up, interpersonal factors are the main enabler for cyberbullying. They shape youth behaviors, normalize online aggression, and diminish existing measures. One particular factor, peer pressure, influences cyberbullying heavily as it directly affects youth's behaviour and their online etiquette (Wong et al., 2018). Thus, in order to minimise cyberbullying, there is a need to change peer norms.

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DRAFT 1
INTRO

DISCUSSION

JUSTIFICATION

Peer pressure, the need for acceptance, and fear of exclusion often drive cyberbullying, especially in socially stratified environments where reputations can be easily damaged online. Among all contributing factors, peer influence is the most significant due to both its direct impact on individuals and its ripple effects across other levels of society.

At the individual level, negative peer interactions, such as bullying or exclusion, undermine self-esteem. This often pushes individuals to seek validation or regain control through online aggression. Within peer groups, exposure to toxic norms fosters a culture where cyberbullying becomes normalised. Youths who grow up in these environments are more likely to adopt similar behaviours online, reinforcing harmful group dynamics. Even institutional efforts to tackle cyberbullying are hindered when peer tensions spill into classrooms, reducing the effectiveness of teachers and school policies. On a broader scale, legal frameworks cannot directly address the interpersonal roots of the issue. Without shifts in social behaviour, such policies function more as reactive measures than preventive solutions. Peer influence is also powerful in shaping perceptions of what is acceptable. In some groups, cyberbullying is framed as a form of humour, bonding, or social currency. This creates an environment where aggressive behaviour is rewarded rather than condemned. The pressure to conform, driven by the desire to maintain social standing or avoid being the next target, can lead individuals to participate in cyberbullying even if they personally disagree. Over time, this fosters a cycle where empathy is dulled and group norms reinforce harmful behaviour.

A clear example of the power of peer dynamics can be seen in Finland's KiVa programme, which successfully reduced cyberbullying by shifting peer group norms. By training students to recognise, report, and challenge harmful behaviour, the programme leverages peer disapproval as a deterrent. This demonstrates that when peer influence is guided positively, it becomes a powerful tool for prevention.

Singapore can draw from this model by implementing peer-led interventions and encouraging bystander action. Strengthening peer support systems within schools can shift social dynamics and prevent cyberbullying before it escalates, addressing the issue at its root rather than relying solely on external regulation.

CONCLUSION

RESEARCH

1. Singapore: High-Pressure, Competitive Peer Culture

• In Singapore, students are immersed in a high-achievement academic culture where **social standing often hinges on academic performance and reputation**.
• Peer groups may weaponise this pressure to **exclude or mock underperforming classmates**, making cyberbullying a tool for social dominance.
• The **intense digital connectivity** among youth in Singapore—through WhatsApp, Telegram, Discord, TikTok—means that **peer-driven bullying can happen 24/7**.
• According to Chia (2024), 17% of young gamers reported online bullying, often in the context of multiplayer gaming where group dynamics enable constant surveillance and judgement.

2. Finland: Strong Peer Support Systems

• In contrast, Finland has implemented **peer mentoring and bystander intervention programmes** in schools, such as the **KiVa anti-bullying programme**.
• These initiatives have been shown to **reverse group norms** that encourage bullying and instead reinforce pro-social peer behaviour (Kärnä et al., 2011).
• As a result, Finland reports one of the **lowest rates of cyberbullying in the OECD** (OECD, 2019), demonstrating the **protective power of healthy peer dynamics**.
• Finnish students are taught early on that **cyberbullying is not socially acceptable**, and peer reinforcement of this norm is key.
https://www.kivaprogram.net/

https://eucpn.org/document/kiva-koulu-kiva-anti-bullying-program

https://bmcpublichealth.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s12889-024-20086-8

3. South Korea: Intense Peer Competition + Cyberbullying

• South Korea presents a parallel case to Singapore, with **extremely competitive education systems and status-oriented peer cultures**.

• A 2022 study by the Korean Education Development Institute showed that **peer-related cyberbullying was the most common form**, often driven by appearance-based shaming or academic comparisons.

• Like Singapore, Korean students report feeling pressure to engage in bullying to **avoid becoming social outcasts**.
• This further supports how **peer influence under conditions of academic stress and social conformity fuels cyberbullying**.

4. The United Kingdom: Focus on Digital Literacy

• The UK has made strides in **embedding peer-led education** about online safety and respect through programmes like **Childnet Digital Leaders**.
• These initiatives empower students to be **role models among their peers**, promoting awareness about the impact of cyberbullying.
• Schools that have implemented peer-led interventions saw **significant decreases in online aggression** (Childnet, 2021).
• The UK example shows that when **peer influence is leveraged positively**, it can serve as a **strong deterrent against cyberbullying**.

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Peer pressure, the desire for acceptance, and experiences of exclusion play a central role in motivating cyberbullying, especially in environments with social hierarchies and easily-destroyed reputations through online slander. Among all factors, peer influence stands as the most significant due to its foundational role in shaping other factors and its direct influence.

Firstly, it holds a foundational role as its impacts introduce a compounding effect that greatly aggravates the other factors of cyberbullying. At an individual level, poor peer interactions contribute to low self-esteem, which in turn leads to online aggression as a form of compensation. Within the community, youths drawn into toxic online cultures often do so because they are already accustomed to aggressive norms within their peer groups. On an institutional scale, school efforts to address cyberbullying fail partly because the same interpersonal tensions spill into classrooms, limiting teacher effectiveness. At the policy stage, laws cannot address interpersonal dynamics directly; without behavioural change at the social level, policies serve more as a safety net than a solution.

Secondly, peer influence has the power to normalise harmful behaviours like cyberbullying due to its direct influence on individuals, as compared to abstract policies or digital anonymity. In peer groups, cyberbullying is often viewed, not as serious misconduct, but as a form of humour, bonding, or social currency. When friends or classmates frequently engage in online teasing, harassment, or exclusion, it sends a signal that such behaviour is acceptable—or even rewarded. This leads to a shared group mentality where the line between banter and bullying becomes blurred, making it difficult for individuals to recognise the harm in their actions. More importantly, the desire to maintain social standing or avoid rejection drives individuals to conform, even if they privately disagree. In highly connected school environments, students may join in on cyberbullying simply to fit in, or to avoid becoming the next target. This creates a self-perpetuating cycle where aggression becomes embedded in group culture, and empathy is gradually eroded. Such peer-driven normalisation is far more immediate and impactful than distant policy efforts or the influence of anonymous online platforms. The power of a close social circle—especially during adolescence—has a profound influence on values, boundaries, and behaviour. Consequently, peer dynamics is not just a contributing factor to cyberbullying, but a core mechanism by which it spreads and becomes socially ingrained. This can be seen from Finland's KiVa programme which is successful in reducing cyberbullying because it focuses on changing peer group norms and empowering students to stand up against bullying. It trains students to recognise, report, and discourage harmful behaviour, making peer disapproval a strong deterrent. This shows that peer influence, when guided positively, is a powerful tool in reducing cyberbullying. Singapore can learn from this by implementing peer-led interventions and encouraging bystander action in schools. By strengthening peer support, it can shift social dynamics and prevent harmful online behaviour before it escalates.