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CYBERSTALKING KNOWLEDGE, RISK PERCEPTION, AND VICTIMIZATION LIKELIHOOD AMONG COLLEGE STUDENTS: EVIDENCE FROM ANGELES CITY

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ABSTRACT

This study examined cyberstalking awareness, risk perception, and prevention measures among university students in an institution in Angeles City, Pampanga. Using a cross-sectional quantitative design, data were collected through a validated questionnaire administered to college students aged 18 and above, with convenience sampling and Slovin's formula applied to determine sample size. Attitudes, knowledge, and behaviors were measured using a 5-point Likert scale and analyzed through descriptive and inferential statistics in SPSS. The findings highlighted differences in cyberstalking awareness and response behaviors based on demographic profiles and internet usage, providing insights for improving institutional digital safety policies and contributing to limited Philippine-based research on cyberstalking.

KEYWORDS: *Cyberstalking, College Students, Risk Awareness, Protective Behaviors, Online Harassment*

INTRODUCTION

Cyberstalking is a technology-facilitated form of harassment involving persistent and unwanted online contact, monitoring, or threats. With increased reliance on digital platforms, college students have become particularly vulnerable due to frequent online engagement and limited cybersecurity awareness. In the Philippines, where social media use is among the highest globally, research on cyberstalking remains scarce. This study examined students' knowledge, risk perception, and likelihood of victimization to address this research gap.

Cyberstalking allows perpetrators to remain anonymous while persistently monitoring victims' online activities, often resulting in psychological distress, identity theft, impersonation, and reputational harm (Makaruk & Głębocka, 2021). Common behaviors include repeated messaging, creation of fake accounts, unauthorized access to online profiles, location tracking, and the non-consensual sharing of private content. Research indicates that university students are particularly susceptible to these behaviors due to limited awareness of online security practices and underestimation of digital risks (Paulus et al., 2022; Mehta & Shekhawat, 2024).

Risk awareness and digital literacy play a crucial role in preventing cyberstalking victimization. Studies have shown that individuals who understand online threats are more likely to adopt protective behaviors such as managing privacy settings, limiting self-disclosure, and reporting suspicious activities (Reeves et al., 2020; Nzeakor et al., 2022). However, many college students lack adequate knowledge of institutional support mechanisms and legal remedies, increasing their vulnerability to cyberstalking-related harm (Al-Khateeb & Epiphaniou, 2020).

In the Philippine context, cyberstalking is addressed under Republic Act No. 10175 or the Cybercrime Prevention Act of 2012, although it is not defined as a standalone offense. Despite a growing number of reported cases of online harassment, enforcement challenges and limited public awareness remain prevalent (DICT, 2023). Local studies largely focus on cybercrime or cyberbullying, leaving cyberstalking among college students under-examined. This research gap highlights the need to examine cyberstalking awareness, perceived risk, victimization likelihood, online activities, and protective strategies among Filipino college students.

Despite the increasing prevalence of cyberstalking, limited empirical evidence exists regarding how college students perceive associated risks and adopt protective behaviors. This study sought to assess the relationship between cyberstalking awareness, perceived risk, victimization likelihood, online activities, and protective strategies among college students, as well as to determine the influence of demographic factors on these variables.

General Objective

To comprehensively assess the relationship among college students' level of knowledge and awareness of cyberstalking, perceived risk, likelihood of victimization, online activities, and

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protective strategies, while examining the influence of demographic factors on these variables.

Specific Objectives

1. To measure the level of knowledge and awareness of cyberstalking among college students and evaluate its distribution across demographic groups (age, gender, academic program).
2. To assess the risk perception (risk felt) of cyberstalking among college students and identify demographic variations.
3. To determine the perceived likelihood of victimization by cyberstalking and its association with demographic factors.
4. To identify and categorize the types of online activities engaged in by college students that may increase their vulnerability to cyberstalking.
5. To identify the internet sites/platforms that students perceive as making them more prone to cyberstalking victimization.
6. To examine the protective strategies employed by students to prevent or mitigate cyberstalking incidents.
7. To analyze the correlations among the following variables: level of knowledge and awareness, risk perception, likelihood of victimization, types of internet activities, sites prone to victimization, and protective strategies.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employs a quantitative, cross-sectional research **design** to examine college students' perception, awareness, and protective behaviors toward cyberstalking. A cross-sectional design is appropriate as it captures a snapshot of attitudes and behaviors at a specific point in time.

Locale of the Study The research was conducted in SPCF, HAU, STI and RCC in Angeles City, Pampanga. The institution was selected due to its large, diverse student population and high engagement in digital communication platforms.

Population and Sampling

The target population are 405 college students aged 18 and above for Academic Year 2025–2026. The study uses convenience sampling to recruit participants who are available and willing. The required sample size will be determined using Slovin's formula with a 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error.

While convenience sampling limits generalizability, it is practical and appropriate for an exploratory study in a university context.

Research Instrument

Data was collected using a structured questionnaire developed by the researchers and validated by research adviser. The survey consists of five parts:

1. Demographic Profile
2. Perception of Cyberstalking
3. Risk Awareness
4. Online Behaviors
5. Protective Actions Taken

Responses are measured using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Disagree (1) to Strongly Agree (5).

SUGGESTIONS

Universities should create thorough cyber safety initiatives that go beyond simply raising awareness to include practical, actionable steps. It is crucial for students to be trained to identify different types of cyberstalking, understand the specific vulnerabilities of various platforms, and implement effective preventive measures, such as managing privacy settings, restricting geotagging, utilizing multi-factor authentication, carefully assessing friend requests, and keeping track of connected accounts. Workshops that are sensitive to gender issues and peer-led programs can specifically target the increased risks experienced by women and marginalized communities, while partnerships with campus IT departments, counseling services, and law enforcement agencies can offer confidential reporting options, advice on how to preserve digital evidence, and support for those affected. By incorporating these strategies into curricula, orientation activities, and continuous campaigns, institutions can create a link between knowledge and behavior, enabling students to take proactive steps in safeguarding their online presence.

CONCLUSION

This study examined cyberstalking knowledge, risk perception, victimization likelihood, online activities, and protective strategies among college students in Angeles City. The findings indicate that while students demonstrated a moderate level of awareness of cyberstalking and perceived themselves to be at considerable risk, their engagement in protective online behaviors remained notably low. Risky online activities such as oversharing personal information, using dating applications, and posting real-time locations were common, increasing students' vulnerability to cyberstalking victimization.

Moreover, differences in awareness, perceived risk, and response behaviors were observed across demographic profiles, suggesting that individual characteristics and internet usage patterns influence students' exposure to cyberstalking. Despite recognizing potential threats, many students lacked sufficient knowledge of preventive measures, institutional support systems, and legal remedies. These findings underscore the gap between awareness and action and highlight the need for targeted digital safety interventions. Strengthening cyberstalking education, promoting responsible online behavior, and enhancing institutional support mechanisms are essential to reducing cyberstalking risks among college students.

Demographic factors, including age, gender, and year level, influenced both cyberstalking awareness and risk perception. Female students and those in higher year levels demonstrated slightly greater awareness and perceived vulnerability, suggesting that exposure to online activities and maturity may enhance recognition of cyber risks. Conversely, younger and first-year students showed lower awareness and were less likely to implement protective measures, highlighting a need for targeted interventions for these groups.

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RESULT AND DISCUSSION

TABLE 1
DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE

Age of the Respondents

Based on the gathered data, the largest portion participants falls within 16-18 years age bracket, totalling 309 students (76.3%). This implies that the majority of those surveyed are younger individuals, likely at the beginning of their college experiences. The second most significant demographic consists of participants aged 19-21 years, with 91 respondents (22.5%), while only 5 respondents (1.2%) belong to the 22-24 age category. This shows that the sample primarily consists of late adolescents and early young adults.

Age	Frequency	Percent
16 - 18 years old	309	76.3
19 - 21 years old	91	22.5
22 - 24 years old	5	1.2
Total	405	100

Sex of Respondents

The data reveals that the majority of respondents are female students with 221 respondents (54.6%), compared to 184 male respondents (45.4%). This suggests that female students slightly exceed the number of male students, which means the study sample has a relatively balanced but female-dominant composition

Sex of Respondent		Frequency	Percent
Valid	**Male**	184	45.4
	Female	221	54.6
	Total	405	100

Year Level of the Respondents

The distribution of participants by year level indicates that the largest group is comprised of third-year students, with 208 respondents (50.9%). This implies that a significant portion of the respondents are already at the midpoint of their college education. Conversely, first-year students represent the smallest group, totalling 54 respondents (13.3%), second-year students make up 81 respondents (15.1%), while fourth-year students account for 84 responents (20.7%). This suggests that the majority of respondents possess a fair amount of experience in their academic pursuits.

Year level of Respondent		Frequency	Percent
Valid	**1st Year**	54	13.3
	2nd Year	61	15.1
	3rd Year	206	50.9
	4th Year	84	20.7
	Total	405	100

TABLE 2

Cyberstalking Knowledge & Awareness Scale for College Students (CKAS-CS)

The average mean is 2.89 with a median of 3.00 and mode of 3.20, which means students are generally “Moderately Aware.” The standard deviation of 0.93 and variance of 0.87 show that their answers are close to each other, meaning most students think the same way. This suggests they know the basics of cyberstalking, but they still lack strong knowledge about laws, services, and concrete actions to deal with it.

TABLE 3

Cyberstalking Risk-Perception Scale for College Students (CRPS-CS)

The average score is 2.84, with both the median and mode at 3.00. This means many students think they are at a high risk of being cyberstalked. The standard deviation of 0.89 and variance of 0.79 show that most students answered in a similar way, so they mostly agree on this. Students feel most unsafe when they share personal details, post their real-time location, or deal with stalkers who come back after being blocked. They also see that things like gender, having public profiles, and even joining school-related online groups can make them more at risk.

TABLE 4

Cyberstalking Victimization Likelihood Scale for College Students (CVLS-CS)

The table shows the Cyberstalking Victimization Likelihood Scale for college students. The average mean is 2.51, with the median and mode both at 2.60, which means students believe it is “likely” they could become victims of cyberstalking. The risks they see as most common are unwanted messages, social media monitoring, stolen personal information, account hacking, and the use of dating apps. On the other hand, they

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consider posting links to other accounts, location tracking through apps, and online harassment escalating into offline harm as "unlikely." The standard deviation of 0.92 and variance of 0.84 show that while there are some differences in responses, most students answered in a very similar way.

TABLE 5
Online Activity Risk Exposure Scale for Cyberstalking (OARES-CS)
The table shows the Online Activity Risk Exposure Scale for Cyberstalking. The average mean is 2.76, with median and mode at 2.90, meaning students "often" do risky online activities that can expose them to cyberstalking. Common risks include posting real-time locations, using dating apps, livestreaming, showing contact info, sharing schedules, linking accounts, joining public forums, and uploading photos with geotags. Only playing online games with strangers was rated "rarely." With a standard deviation of 0.97 and variance of 0.94, most answers were similar.

TABLE 6
Internet-Platform Proneness to Cyberstalking Scale (IP-PCS)
The table show the Internet-Platform Proneness to Cyberstalking Scale. The average mean is 2.29 with median and mode 2.00, which mean students mostly "disagree" that online platforms make them high risk. Only using short-video apps like TikTok or Reels got "agree," while things like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, dating apps, livestreaming, gaming, anonymous forums, Snapchat, and Discord mostly got "disagree." The standard deviation of 0.94 and variance of 0.88 show answers are kinda close, so many students think almost same.

TABLE 7
Cyberstalking Protective-Strategies Scale for College Students (CPSS-CS)
The table show the Cyberstalking Protective-Strategies Scale for College Students. The average mean is 2.05 with median 2.00 and mode 1.90, which mean students "rarely" use protective strategies online. Things like using 2FA, blocking or muting stalkers, tightening privacy, not sharing real-time location, saving evidence, reporting, and updating passwords are done only sometimes, not really often. The standard deviation of 0.99 and variance of 0.99 show the answers are close, so students almost think the same.

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