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CYBERBULLYING AT WORK:
EXPLORING UNDERSTANDINGS AND EXPERIENCES

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

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Despite growing evidence that workplace cyberbullying exerts a significant toll on employees and organisations, conceptualisation issues linger, impeding efforts toward prevention and intervention. Indeed, researchers continue to frame cyberbullying as an electronic extension of traditional bullying – overlooking the intricacies and potentially more damaging nature of this phenomenon, due to various cyber-specific features – or disregard conceptualisation altogether. Therefore, the main aim of this research was to explore how workplace cyberbullying is understood and experienced in New Zealand, with a focus on nursing.

A three-study qualitative, interview-based research design was employed, with findings from each stage informing the subsequent research progress. Study one explored subject matter experts’ perspectives on workplace cyberbullying. In addition to suggesting a differentiation of cyberbullying from traditional bullying as a construct, findings also revealed professional-based distinctions around approaches to measurement and management, emphasising the subjectivity and contextual nature of cyberbullying. In line with these findings, studies two and three adopted a context-specific approach in exploring nurses’ understandings and experiences of workplace cyberbullying, respectively. The focus on nursing was intended to address a substantial knowledge gap: although this profession experiences higher-than-average rates of traditional bullying, to date, there had been no efforts to investigate how workplace cyberbullying manifested and was experienced within this group.

Findings from study two suggested that although academics and nurses generally conceptualised workplace cyberbullying as being a distinct phenomenon, nurses tended to emphasise target perceptions of victimisation over features such as repetition and intent. Based on this understanding, a purpose-specific definition was formulated for study three to explore nurse experiences of workplace cyberbullying. Accordingly, it emerged that not only did most targets experience co-occurring forms of bullying, but in some cases, cyberbullying was
perceived as more distressing with a potentially wider scope of harm. Further, findings from study three uncovered the risk of nurses experiencing cyberbullying from external sources such as students, patients, and patient relatives. Unfortunately, several work-related and industry-specific factors frequently presented barriers to reporting and successful resolution. Beyond these contributions to our knowledge on workplace cyberbullying, a multi-factor socio-ecological model is also posited as a framework guiding future research, as well as prevention and intervention efforts.
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_I can no other answer make but thanks, and thanks; and ever thanks_
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