

## Cyber Dating Abuse Perpetration By Malay Women: Do Jealousy and Feminine Gender Norms Matter?

*Penderaan Janji Temu Dalam Talian Oleh Wanita Melayu: Adakah Perasaan Cemburu dan Norma Jantina Feminin Penting?*

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### ABSTRACT

*While jealousy and gender norms are often discussed in the context of relationship conflict, their specific roles in cyber dating abuse remain underexplored, particularly among Malay women. The present study addresses this gap by examining one critical question: Do feelings of jealousy and conformity to feminine norms relate to the perpetration of cyber dating abuse in romantic relationships? Using a cross-sectional design and a convenience sampling method, data were collected from 124 Malay women who had been or were currently involved in a romantic relationship. Perpetration of cyber dating abuse was assessed using the Cyber Dating Abuse Questionnaire, while jealousy was measured using the Multidimensional Jealousy Scale, and the Conformity to Feminine Norms Inventory-45 evaluated adherence to feminine norms. Results revealed that behavioural jealousy was a significant, positive predictor of cyber dating abuse perpetration, while emotional jealousy inversely predicted such behaviour. Conformity to feminine norms, however, did not significantly predict cyber dating abuse perpetration. Drawing on the process model of emotion regulation, feminist theory, and the socioecological model, the results highlight the complex role of jealousy in cyber dating abuse and suggest that its emotional and behavioural expressions may influence abusive behaviours in distinct ways. The lack of a significant relationship between conformity to feminine norms and abuse perpetration calls for the need to reconsider cultural assumptions surrounding gender and aggression in future research. Ultimately, addressing both the emotional and behavioural aspects of jealousy may guide the development of targeted interventions to prevent cyber dating abuse perpetrated by women.*

*Keywords: Cyber Dating Abuse; Feminine Norms; Jealousy; Malay Women; Perpetration*

### ABSTRAK

*Walaupun perasaan cemburu dan norma jantina sering dibincangkan dalam konteks konflik perhubungan, peranan khusus mereka dalam penderaan janji temu dalam talian masih kurang dikaji, terutamanya dalam kalangan wanita Melayu. Kajian ini mengisi jurang tersebut dengan menyoal satu persoalan kritikal: Adakah perasaan cemburu dan pemuatan kepada norma jantina feminin berkaitan dengan penderaan janji temu dalam talian dalam hubungan percintaan? Dengan menggunakan kajian keratan rentas dan kaedah persampelan mudah, data telah dikumpul daripada 124 wanita Melayu yang pernah atau sedang terlibat dalam perhubungan percintaan. Penderaan janji temu dalam talian dinilai menggunakan Soal Selidik Penderaan Janji Temu Dalam Talian, manakala perasaan cemburu diukur menggunakan Skala Kecemburuan Berbilang Dimensi, dan Inventori Pemuatan kepada Norma Feminin-45 digunakan untuk mengukur pemuatan kepada norma feminin. Hasil dapatan menunjukkan kecemburuan tingkah laku adalah peramal yang signifikan bagi perlakuan penderaan janji temu dalam talian, manakala kecemburuan emosi meramalkan perbuatan sedemikian secara bertentangan arah. Namun begitu, pemuatan kepada norma jantina feminin tidak meramalkan perbuatan penderaan janji temu dalam talian secara signifikan. Berdasarkan model proses regulasi emosi, teori feminis, dan model sosioekologi, dapatan kajian menunjukkan peranan kompleks yang dimainkan oleh perasaan cemburu dalam hubungan dalam talian dan mencadangkan bahawa kecemburuan emosi dan tingkah laku mungkin berbeza kesannya terhadap corak tingkah laku kasar. Kekurangan hubungan yang signifikan antara pemuatan kepada norma jantina feminin dengan penderaan memerlukan penilaian semula andaian budaya dalam kajian masa hadapan. Akhirnya, menangani kedua-dua aspek emosi dan tingkah laku cemburu wajar dipertimbangkan dalam pembangunan program intervensi yang disasarkan untuk mencegah penderaan janji temu dalam talian yang dilakukan oleh wanita.*

*Kata kunci: Penderaan Janji Temu Dalam Talian; Norma Jantina Feminin; Cemburu; Wanita Melayu; Perlakuan*

## INTRODUCTION

Relationship abuse, in any form, is a grave issue that affects individuals, families, and communities to the extent that it is recognised as a significant societal and public health concern (Cava et al., 2020). In Malaysia, there has been an alarming rise in the prevalence of aggressive behaviours in romantic relationships, with the number of cases reported to the police increased from 2555 cases in 2011 to 3643 cases in 2020 (Munusamy et al., 2024), and nearly 500000 people experiencing violence perpetrated by an intimate partner (Institute for Public Health, 2023). In reality, the actual numbers could be much higher due to underreporting or other factors.

Studies conducted worldwide, including in Malaysia, have shown that intimate partner violence is associated with several factors, such as lower educational background, lower socio-economic status, prior exposure to violence, substance abuse, violence-condoning attitudes, partners' controlling behaviour, involvement in fights, and lack of social support (Kadir Shahar et al., 2020). However, the rapid advancement of digital technology has transformed the dynamics of romantic relationships over time and across contexts, thereby giving rise to new and increasingly complex forms of risk. These shifts highlight the evolving landscape of intimate partner violence in the digital age.

Whether technology serves as a genuine boon or a potential bane in relationships, one issue remains a constant concern, which is dating abuse. Defined as the act of controlling, monitoring, harassing, stalking, threatening, or abusing one's dating partner using digital communication technologies and social media (David-Ferdon & Hertz, 2007; Zweig et al., 2014), cyber dating abuse is an emerging form of intimate partner violence that manifests across cultural and national boundaries. The literature has established two principal dimensions of cyber dating abuse. The first is direct aggression, which refers to behaviours intended to cause harm to the partner through social networks or instant messages, whereas the second involves monitoring and controlling behaviours related to surveillance and invasion of privacy (Borrajo et al., 2015).

The effects of cyber dating abuse are especially harrowing as they relate to depressive symptoms (Hinduja & Patchin, 2020), anxiety, anger, and hostility (Zweig et al., 2014), substance misuse, suicidal ideation, and post-traumatic stress disorder (Lu et al., 2018), low self-esteem (Smith et al., 2018), as well as health risk behaviours (Dick et al., 2014), including risky sexual behaviours (Van Ouytsel et al., 2016). As a result of these detrimental effects experienced by victims, it is important to examine the factors or antecedents that can predict the perpetration of cyber dating abuse, which becomes the focus of this study.

Previous research has examined factors such as gender (Martínez-Soto & Ibabe, 2024), age (Li et al., 2023), aggressiveness (Borrajo et al., 2015; Zweig et al., 2014), jealousy (Branson & March, 2021), as well as an extension of in-person or face-to-face dating violence (Rodríguez-deArriba et al., 2024) when examining cyber dating abuse. Nevertheless, most of these studies are Western-based and performed in predominantly white populations. As such, their results and explanations may not necessarily be applicable to other racial or cultural groups.

Although not specifically investigated cyber dating abuse perpetration, recent Malaysian and Asian studies do show that technology-facilitated partner control and gendered attitudes can shape online relationship behaviours and intimate partner violence. For example, a report by Women's Aid Organisation (2021) revealed that there are pervasive societal tendencies among Malaysians to excuse perpetrators and normalise gender inequality, which, in turn, may normalise surveillance or controlling behaviours in intimate relationships. Prevalence studies such as those by Kadir Shahar et al. (2020) and Mas'udah et al. (2024) also reported that emotional forms of

intimate partner violence are common in Malaysia and Indonesia, suggesting the local salience of emotional drivers such as jealousy and relationship monitoring. At the same time, Low et al. (2022) found that digital or online dating is associated with risky sexual behaviours, substance use, and harassment, particularly among women and men who have sex with men in Asia.

While studies by Women's Aid Organisation (2021), Kadir Shahar et al. (2020), and Low et al. (2022) have contributed valuable insights into intimate partner violence or cyber dating abuse in the local context, they predominantly focus on men as perpetrators and women as victims. This, in turn, leaves a gap in understanding women's perpetration of such behaviour. Based on this reasoning, we conducted a study investigating whether psychological and behavioural determinants predict the perpetration of cyber dating abuse. In this study, we are particularly interested in investigating how jealousy and gender, especially gender norms, predict the perpetration of cyber dating abuse, which is discussed in the next section. The assessment of these factors is important because of the strong interest in the psychological, sociological, and law enforcement communities in preventing this abusive behaviour from occurring, as well as in developing effective interventions to address the problem. As such, the objective of this study is to examine the interrelations between jealousy, feminine gender norms, and cyber dating abuse perpetration among Malay women in Malaysia.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

A recent study by Kaspersky (2024) involving 21000 respondents worldwide and 1000 in Malaysia revealed that almost half of Malaysian respondents had experienced some form of online stalking and digital abuse from the person they were newly dating. Similarly, in their meta-analysis, Li et al. (2023) found that the global prevalence of cyber dating abuse ranges between 43.4% and 44.6%, indicating that this crisis transcends geographic and cultural boundaries and warrants the need to examine the factors that drive such behaviour.

Involvement in cyber dating abuse behaviour may take the form of the perpetrator (the one who did the abuse) or the victim (the one who is being abused) (Li et al., 2023). Existing evidence indicates that men are more often perpetrators of abuse against women (Kadir Shahar et al., 2020); hence, perpetrators are usually described as male. However, an increasing number of studies have shown that men can also be the victims of relationship abuse and thus require support and intervention. For example, in their study on cyber dating abuse among Chinese youth, Xu et al. (2025) found that women have more perpetration behaviours and less victimisation than men. Men are also at more risk than women of being victims of emotional abuse in romantic relationships (Karakurt & Silver, 2013).

It has been established that one of the primary reasons for the perpetration of cyber dating abuse is jealousy (Branson & March, 2021). Research suggests that jealousy is a multidimensional construct, with affective, cognitive, and behavioural components interacting in a complex system. The affective component refers to emotional distress triggered by jealousy-inducing situations, whereas the cognitive component involves thoughts that arise in jealous situations, such as rational or irrational concerns about partner infidelity, and finally, the behavioural component is the actions taken in response to jealousy, such as monitoring partner's communications to detect signs of infidelity (Pfeiffer & Wong, 1989).

Although findings are mixed with respect to which component most influences cyber dating abuse, some consistent patterns are evident. For example, cognitive jealousy has been found to be a stronger driver of cyber dating abuse, which then leads to behavioural jealousy (Ramírez-Carrasco et al., 2023). However, behavioural jealousy itself significantly predicted cyber dating abuse perpetration (Deans & Bhogal, 2019). Yet, other studies, such as those by Derby, Knox, and Easterling (2012), Furtado et al. (2024), and Ndombele (2017), reported that heightened emotional jealousy predicts the onset of cyber dating abuse.

Another factor that contributes to cyber dating abuse perpetration but remains underexplored is gender norms, i.e., the broad societal expectations about masculinity and femininity. Masculinity is characterised as behaviours, traits, and beliefs typically associated with men or manhood, such as agency, independence, social dominance, aggression, and self-affirmation (Levant et al., 2015; Parent et al., 2019). In contrast, femininity is attributed to those related to being sensitive to others' needs, understanding, compassion, warmth, affection, tenderness, prone to crying, and submission (Malonda et al., 2023).

Conforming to gender norms has been associated with the perpetration of online dating violence and cyber dating abuse (Er et al., 2022; Reed et al., 2021; Van Ouytsel et al., 2020). Specifically, males who exhibit higher levels of masculinity are more likely to perpetrate aggression in cyber relationships (March et al., 2021; Nez, 2023). Conversely, females who strive to conform to feminine norms have also reported engaging in abusive behaviors, often because they sought to emulate peers who display similar aggressive tendencies (Van Ouytsel et al., 2020). Within the local context, Shaari and Sannusi (2017), who analysed Facebook interactions among adolescents, asserted that gendered socialisation and culturally embedded communication patterns shape how men and women enact power and intimacy online. Such work supports interpreting cyber dating abuse as situated within locally patterned digital gender practices, rather than as purely individual pathology.

Evidence from Malaysian contexts also confirms that women can be perpetrators of serious antisocial and aggressive behaviour, with motives often intertwined with social, economic, and psychological factors. For instance, a qualitative study of female prisoners in Peninsular Malaysia by Mohd Nor et al. (2019) found that women's involvement in criminal acts was often related to social or environmental pressures as well as psychological vulnerabilities, with some offenses arising from coercion or as protective/compensatory acts within constrained circumstances. Although Mohd Nor et al.'s (2019) study focuses on incarcerated women and not on dating contexts per se, its findings caution against assuming that female-perpetrated harm is exceptional or uniform. Instead, they point toward complex motive structures that encompass economic, relational, and affective, which may also be relevant in explaining why some women engage in controlling or aggressive behaviours online.

To explain how jealousy and feminine gender norms can jointly produce cyber dating abuse perpetration by women, a framework that integrates emotion regulation (Gross, 1998), feminist theory (Renzetti, 2013), and Bronfenbrenner's (1979) socioecological model is warranted. First, jealousy functions as a salient emotional trigger in intimate relationships, often activating regulatory processes that can culminate in maladaptive behaviours. Gross's (1998) process model of emotion regulation posits that individuals confronted with emotional triggers like jealousy may intervene early through antecedent-focused strategies (e.g., reappraisal) or later through response-focused strategies (e.g., suppression or expression). Early-stage regulation generally facilitates adaptive outcomes, whereas later, response-focused strategies often heighten emotional intensity and risk reactive behaviours (Gross, 2002). When jealousy is experienced but inadequately

regulated, the likelihood of impulsive or controlling responses, particularly in digital contexts, tends to increase.

And yet, the regulation of jealousy does not occur in a social vacuum. Feminist theory highlights that women's perpetration of abusive behaviours must be understood within the same gendered and socio-cultural structures that shape their victimisation experiences (Renzetti, 2013). The theory further suggests that gender norms shape the repertoire of emotion-regulation strategies deemed socially acceptable. Prevailing feminine norms, such as the expectation to preserve relational harmony, to protect the relationship, and to avoid overt aggression, can push women away from direct confrontation and toward indirect or digital tactics that appear relationally appropriate yet serve controlling functions. Thus, socialised expectations of femininity may fundamentally change how women enact emotional regulation in the context of romantic relationships (Dowd & Lambo, 2022).

Complementing both the emotion regulation model and feminist theory, Bronfenbrenner's socioecological model (1979) situates cyber dating abuse perpetration within multiple, interacting layers of influence. Specifically, the model posits that the environment makes some choices easy and reinforces these behaviours. For example, within the microsystem, peers may normalise digital monitoring as evidence of relational commitment, while within the macrosystem, cultural contexts that equate romantic vigilance with devotion make online surveillance or control easy, and even socially rewarded. In short, when women (i) feel jealous, (ii) are socialised to protect relationships but discouraged from overt aggression, and (iii) have accessible technological affordances plus social reinforcement, they are more likely to choose digital surveillance, harassment, or manipulation as a way to cope or to control the relationship.

In light of the existing literature on cyber dating abuse and our discussion so far, it is apparent that masculinity has typically been the primary focus of interest, with femininity does not seem to have been the subject of research and thus remains obscure. Understanding the potential role of femininity in the perpetration of cyber dating abuse is crucial, particularly given that previous research has linked feminine traits to both cyber relational aggression (Wright, 2020) and the enactment of controlling behaviours (Reed et al., 2021). Furthermore, investigating the factors that predict the perpetration of cyber dating abuse is essential given its pervasive and damaging impact on individuals and relationships. Despite this, very few studies have examined cyber dating abuse in Malaysia, and even fewer have investigated perpetration rates by Malay women and the potential predictors, such as jealousy and conformity to feminine norms. As such, a study is warranted to elucidate how cyber dating abuse perpetration is related to these variables, which could offer some new data or perspective for further improvements. To this end, we pose one key question: Do jealousy and feminine gender norms matter in cyber dating abuse perpetration? Following this line of inquiry, we conducted a study to examine how jealousy and conformity to feminine norms relate to the perpetration of cyber dating abuse by Malay women. By investigating these factors, we seek to better understand the emotional and cultural dynamics that contribute to abusive behaviours in online relationships.



## METHODOLOGY

The study used a quantitative, cross-sectional approach, with data obtained through a self-administered questionnaire. Upon approval and permission from the ethical committee and respective scale developers, the questionnaire was created using Google Forms and pretested on 16 participants to determine its feasibility and clarity. No major revisions were made, as most of the participants reported that the questions were easy to understand and that the layout and format were easy to follow. The link to the finalised questionnaire was then distributed via electronic outreach for the main study.

Participants were recruited using convenience sampling via posts on social media platforms, such as WhatsApp, Telegram, Facebook, and Instagram, to ensure ease of completion and brisk recruitment. Inclusion criteria were: (1) self-identified Malay woman, (2) aged 18 years or above, (3) currently in or have had a romantic/dating relationship, and (4) have access to a smartphone. The convenience sampling technique was used because it allowed access to individuals who were willing and comfortable to take part in a sensitive topic, thereby increasing the likelihood of gaining trust and honest self-reporting. Second, it was a practical choice of obtaining a sufficient number of participants within the study's time and resource constraints while maintaining confidentiality and minimising potential discomfort. Although this method may limit the generalisability of the findings, it is appropriate for exploratory research on sensitive issues, where the primary objective is to gain insight into patterns and behaviours, for which voluntary participation is essential.

The final sample for the main study was made up of 124 Malay women ( $M_{age} = 22.55$  years,  $SD = 1.17$ ) from various states in Malaysia. All of them are Malaysians and have had a romantic relationship or were involved in a romantic relationship at the time of the study. Almost all participants use smartphones to communicate with their partners. The demographic characteristics of the participants are summarised in TABLE 1.

TABLE 1. Participant's demographic characteristics ( $n = 124$ )

Characteristics	n	%	Mean	Std Deviation
Age			22.55	1.17
State				
Selangor	61	49.2		
Johor	12	9.7		
Kedah	11	8.9		
Terengganu	9	7.3		
Kuala Lumpur	8	6.5		
Pahang	7	5.6		
Kelantan	7	5.6		
Negeri Sembilan	3	2.4		
Malacca	3	2.4		
Perak	2	1.6		
Sarawak	1	.8		
Device used to communicate with partners				
Smartphones	121	97.6		
Others	3	2.4		

The questionnaire used in this study contained demographic items and three scales (see below). For demographics questions, information obtained from participants included biological gender and ethnicity (for screening purposes), age, state of residence, and devices or gadgets used to communicate with partners.

As the dependent variable in this study, cyber dating abuse was assessed using the Cyber Dating Abuse Questionnaire (CDAQ; Borrajo et al., 2015). This scale measures cyber dating abuse from two perspectives: perpetration and victimisation. Since the present study focused on the experience of cyber dating abuse as a perpetrator, our survey included 20 items on online abusive behaviours, which are divided into two dimensions: direct aggression (11 items) and monitoring control (nine items). The former includes actions with the intention to hurt one's partner (item example: *"I created a fake profile of my partner or a former partner on a social network to cause problems"*). The latter (monitoring control) refers to using technologies to control one's partner (item example: *"I controlled my partner's or ex-partner's wall status updates on social networks"*).

All items in the CDAQ were rated on a six-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (Never = This has never happened in the relationship) to 6 (Usually = It has happened more than 20 times). For both direct aggression and monitoring control subscales, the items were summed to create mean scores where higher scores indicate higher levels of abuse. The Cronbach's alpha values obtained in this study are as follows: (i) direct aggression:  $\alpha = .93$ ; (ii) monitoring control:  $\alpha = .89$ ; and (iii) overall:  $\alpha = .94$ ; all indicative of good reliability.

Jealousy was measured using the Multidimensional Jealousy Scale (MDJS; Pfeiffer & Wong, 1989), which is an established instrument that measures jealousy that might occur when people are involved in a romantic relationship. It is a 24-item self-report scale developed to assess three components of jealousy: cognitive, behavioural, and emotional, each with eight items. All items in the cognitive component were responded to on a seven-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (All the time) to 7 (Never) and reversed-coded such that 1 becomes 7, 2 becomes 6, and so on. Higher total scores indicate higher cognitive jealousy. The Cronbach's alpha for this sub-scale in this study was .89.

For the emotional component, the items were rated on a seven-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (Very pleased) to 7 (Very upset), with higher total scores reflecting more emotional jealousy. Cronbach's alpha obtained for this sub-scale in this study was .86. The third component (behavioural) has a response format of a seven-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 = Never to 7 = All the time. A higher total score suggests greater behavioural jealousy. Cronbach's alpha value for this scale in this study was .77.

The Conformity to Feminine Norms Inventory-45 (CFNI-45; Parent & Moradi, 2010) was used in this study to assess the degree to which participants conform, or not, to various feminine norms. Its response format is a four-point Likert-type scale ranging from 0 (Strongly disagree) to 3 (Strongly agree). There are nine sub-scales designed to measure different components of femininity, which are: (i) thinness, e.g., *"I would be happier if I was thinner"*; (ii) domestic, e.g., *"It is important to keep your living space clean"*; (iii) investment in appearance, e.g., *"I spend more than 30 minutes a day doing my hair and make-up"*; (iv) modesty, e.g., *"I tell everyone about my accomplishment"*; (v) relational, e.g., *"I believe that my friendships should be maintained at all costs"*; (vi) involvement with children, e.g., *"Taking care of children is extremely fulfilling"*; (vii) sexual fidelity, e.g., *"I would only have sex if I were in a committed relationship like marriage"*; (viii) involvement in romantic relationships, *"Having a romantic relationship is essential in life"*; and (ix) having sweet and nice relationships, e.g., *"Being nice to others is extremely important"*.

Following the scale's instructions, 21 of the 45 items in the CFNI-45 were reversed prior to summing the scores to produce sub-scale and total scale scores (Parent & Moradi, 2010). Scores are then summed for each component, with higher total scores indicating greater conformity to

traditional feminine norms. In this study, internal consistency values obtained for the scales range from .34 to .82.

Informed consent was obtained from all participants in this study. Data were analysed by descriptive statistics, correlational tests, and regression analyses using IBM SPSS Statistics version 26.

## RESULTS

Preliminary analyses showed that there were no violations of the assumptions of normality, linearity, multicollinearity, and homoscedasticity. TABLE 2 shows that the total cyber dating abuse mean score is 1.49 ( $SD = .71$ ), while direct aggression has a mean score of 1.38 ( $SD = .69$ ) and monitoring control is 1.62 ( $SD = .88$ ). These values indicate that perpetration of cyber dating abuse among the participants is there and has happened before, albeit low. Participants were more likely to report emotional jealousy ( $M = 47.01$ ;  $SD = 7.47$ ), followed by cognitive jealousy ( $M = 24.76$ ,  $SD = 11.12$ ), and less likely to report behavioural jealousy ( $M = 21.27$ ,  $SD = 8.50$ ). Conformity to feminine norms had an overall mean score of 83.66 ( $SD = 9.52$ ), with domestic, sexual fidelity, and sweet and nice relationship norms being the highest. These results suggest that conformity to feminine norms is high among the participants.

TABLE 2. Descriptive statistics of variables ( $n = 124$ )

Variable	$\alpha$	Mean	Std Deviation	Skewness		Kurtosis	
				Statistic	Std Error	Statistic	Std Error
Cyber dating abuse (CDA)							
CDA total	.94	1.49	.71	2.32	.22	5.32	.43
Direct aggression	.93	1.38	.69	2.78	.22	7.52	.43
Monitoring control	.89	1.62	.88	1.86	.22	2.92	.43
Jealousy							
Cognitive jealousy	.89	24.76	11.12	.41	.22	-2.29	.43
Emotional jealousy	.86	47.01	7.47	-1.12	.22	1.83	.43
Behavioural jealousy	.77	21.27	8.50	.60	.22	.53	.43
Conformity to feminine norms (CFN)							
Thinness	.82	8.37	4.22	-.34	.22	-.86	.43
Domestic	.59	12.04	2.14	-.56	.22	-.51	.43
Invest in appearance	.57	8.37	3.01	-.39	.22	-.54	.43
Modesty	.58	7.46	2.56	-.09	.22	.35	.43
Relational	.66	8.61	2.89	.12	.22	-.46	.43
Involvement with children	.79	8.29	3.60	-.15	.22	-.65	.43
Sexual fidelity	.34	11.34	2.48	-.24	.22	-.51	.43
Involvement in romantic relationships	.60	8.24	2.94	-.02	.22	-.40	.43
Sweet and nice relationships	.44	10.94	2.29	-.55	.22	.23	.43
CFN total	.59	83.66	9.52	-.22	.22	-.32	.43

Correlational analyses showed that the cyber dating abuse measures (overall, direct aggression, and monitoring control) were all significantly and positively correlated with one another. Overall, cyber dating abuse scores positively and significantly correlated with cognitive jealousy and behavioural jealousy, but negatively correlated with emotional jealousy. Similar patterns of results were obtained between direct aggression scores and jealousy measures. For



monitoring control, there were positive, significant correlations between the component and cognitive jealousy and behavioural jealousy. However, no significant correlation was found between the component and emotional jealousy. With the exception of a significant positive correlation between monitoring control and involvement in romantic relationships, no significant correlations were obtained between the cyber dating measures and the conformity to feminine norms components. The intercorrelations among the variables are summarised in TABLE 3.

Three separate hierarchical multiple regressions were conducted to assess whether the predictor variables predicted cyber dating abuse perpetration. With overall cyber dating abuse scores as the criterion (dependent variable), the first regression results show that behavioural jealousy was a significant, positive predictor of cyber dating abuse ( $B = .04, \beta = .45, p < .001$ ), suggesting that high levels of behavioural jealousy led to high levels of cyber dating abuse perpetration. Interestingly, emotional jealousy was also a significant predictor of cyber dating abuse ( $B = -.03, \beta = -.27, p = .001$ ), but in a negative sense: the higher the emotional jealousy, the less the perpetration of cyber dating abuse.

Behavioural jealousy ( $B = .03, \beta = .30, p = .002$ ) and emotional jealousy ( $B = -.03, \beta = -.35, p < .001$ ) remained significant predictors of direct aggression in the second regression analysis. However, only behavioural jealousy significantly predicted monitoring control in the third regression analysis ( $B = .05, \beta = .52, p < .001$ ). None of the conformity to feminine norms components were significant predictors of cyber dating abuse perpetration in all three analyses. TABLE 4 summarises the beta values for all variables.

TABLE 3: Intercorrelations among cyber dating abuse perpetration, multidimensional jealousy, and conformity to feminine norms

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
1 Cyber dating abuse perpetration total	-	.91**	.92**	.24**	-.21*	.46**	.11	-.11	.11	-.04	-.03	-.10	-.14	.14	-.14	-.02
2 Direct aggression		-	.67**	.22*	-.30**	.31**	.13	-.12	.05	.00	.00	-.10	-.11	.07	-.14	-.03
3 Monitoring control			-	.22*	-.08	.53**	.07	-.09	.15	-.07	-.06	-.08	-.14	.19*	-.11	-.01
4 Cognitive jealousy				-	-.03	.38**	.15	-.05	.19*	.03	-.03	-.13	-.06	.00	-.02	.04
5 Emotional jealousy					-	.12	-.01	.08	.15	.04	-.02	.01	-.06	.19*	.23*	.17
6 Behavioural jealousy						-	.15	.04	.18*	-.17	-.08	-.06	-.09	.26**	-.04	.09
7 Thinnes							-	.04	.06	.00	-.06	-.03	-.14	.01	-.11	.38**
8 Domestic								-	.02	-.02	.17	.19*	.02	.03	.17	.42**
9 Invest in appearance									-	-.15	-.06	-.14	-.05	.07	.04	.26**
10 Modesty										-	-.25**	.10	-.09	.15	-.03	.19*
11 Relational											-	.20*	.07	-.24**	.21*	.30**
12 Involvement with children												-	.08	.13	.16	.55**
13 Sexual fidelity													-	.02	.26**	.29**
14 Involvement in romantic relationships														-	.09	.39**
15 Sweet and nice relationships															-	.45**
16 Conformity to feminine norms total																-

Note: \*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed). \*\*Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

TABLE 4. Regression coefficients for predicting cyber dating abuse perpetration

	<b>B</b>	<b>SE</b>	<b>β</b>	<b>t</b>	<b>p</b>
Criterion / Outcome: Cyber dating abuse perpetration total					
	.00	.01	.03	.35	.73
	-.03	.01	-.27	-3.28	<b>.001**</b>
	.04	.01	.45	4.89	<b>.000**</b>
	.00	.01	.02	.27	.79
	-.03	.03	-.10	-1.28	.21
Predictor	.01	.02	.06	.74	.46
	.02	.02	.06	.70	.49
	.02	.02	.09	1.04	.30
	-.01	.02	-.06	-.71	.48
	-.03	.02	-.09	-1.12	.27
	.02	.02	.10	1.15	.25
	-.01	.03	-.036	-.42	.68
$R^2 = 32.6\%$ , $F(12, 111) = 4.48$ , $p < .001$					
Criterion / Outcome: Direct aggression					
	.00	.01	.06	.66	.51
	-.03	.01	-.35	-3.99	<b>.000**</b>
	.03	.01	.30	3.13	<b>.002**</b>
	.01	.01	.07	.79	.43
	-.03	.03	-.10	-1.17	.24
Predictor	.01	.02	.03	.37	.71
	.02	.03	.08	.88	.38
	.03	.02	.11	1.22	.23
	-.01	.02	-.07	-.83	.41
	-.02	.02	-.08	-.93	.36
	.02	.02	.09	.94	.35
	-.01	.028	-.03	-.27	.79
$R^2 = 26.1\%$ , $F(12, 111) = 3.26$ , $p < .001$					
Criterion / Outcome: Monitoring control					
	.00	.01	-.00	-.05	.96
	-.02	.01	-.15	-1.86	.07
	.05	.01	.52	5.65	<b>.000**</b>
	-.01	.02	-.02	-.31	.76
	-.04	.03	-.09	-1.11	.27
Predictor	.02	.02	.08	.97	.34
	.01	.03	.03	.36	.72
	.02	.03	.06	.65	.52
	-.01	.02	-.04	-.44	.66
	-.03	.03	-.09	-1.07	.29
	.03	.03	.10	1.12	.26
	-.02	.03	-.04	-.48	.63
$R^2 = 33.8\%$ , $F(12, 111) = 4.71$ , $p < .001$					

Note: Only final models are presented. \*\*Significant at the 0.01 level.

## DISCUSSION

One question we seek to answer in this study is whether jealousy and feminine gender norms matter in predicting cyber dating abuse, particularly pertaining to its perpetration. Based on the analyses, the answer is yes to the former but no to the latter.

With regard to jealousy, we found two important findings. First, behavioural jealousy significantly predicted overall cyber dating abuse, direct aggression, and monitoring control, suggesting that higher levels of jealousy predict a greater likelihood of perpetrating cyber dating abuse. To contextualise this finding within previous research, there were some indicators for a possible relationship between behavioural jealousy and cyber dating abuse. Pfeiffer and Wong

(1989) argued that behavioural jealousy has the potential to be pathological and, thus, could lead to the perpetration of abuse in a romantic relationship. This assertion is supported by a number of studies that showed behavioural jealousy is associated with negative consequences in romantic relationships, such as hostile and abusive behaviour, which could then lead to attempts at control and monitoring a partner (Deans & Bhogal, 2019; Hernández-Santaolalla & Hermida, 2020).

Second, significant negative relationships between emotional jealousy and overall cyber dating abuse, as well as between emotional jealousy and direct aggression, were found, with higher levels of emotional jealousy predicting a lower likelihood of perpetrating cyber dating abuse and direct aggression. These findings are interesting because, in most literature, positive relationships are usually obtained (e.g., Derby, Knox, & Easterling, 2012; Furtado et al., 2024). One possible explanation might be that in contrast to cognitive jealousy and behavioural jealousy, which are often seen as the dark side of jealousy, emotional jealousy tends to have an adaptive role in relationships (Attridge, 2013; Elphinston et al., 2011) and is associated with higher relationship satisfaction (Ökten, 2016), higher social activity levels (Çapkın, 2012), and higher well-being (Aykutoğlu, 2021). It is also likely that higher levels of emotional jealousy correlate with a lower likelihood of abuse perpetration if individuals have more secure attachment and emotional regulation skills (Karakoçoğlu & Hasdağ, 2025; Karakurt, 2001) or if they have been exposed to non-abusive conflict resolution strategies (Aldao, Nolen-Hoeksema, & Schweizer, 2010; Gross & John, 2003). To what extent these factors can account for the degree of inconsistency in our results is beyond the scope of this study, but they could be a potential area for future research.

From Gross's (1998) process model of emotion regulation, it can be implied that behavioural jealousy reflects response-focused regulation, where individuals act upon jealousy after emotional arousal has occurred rather than employing antecedent-focused strategies like reappraisal. The link between behavioural jealousy and cyber dating abuse perpetration, especially digital monitoring, suggests that jealousy-driven distress was managed through action-oriented strategies aimed at restoring control or reducing uncertainty. In contrast, the negative association between emotional jealousy and cyber dating abuse perpetration implies that individuals who are more attuned to, or accepting of, their emotional states may engage in earlier, more adaptive forms of regulation that reduce impulsive responses. Thus, our findings support Gross's (1998; 2002) model, such that maladaptive regulation manifests as controlling digital behaviour, whereas emotional awareness may buffer against such reactions.

Bronfenbrenner's (1979) socioecological model further contextualises these findings by emphasising how environmental systems amplify or inhibit emotion-regulation behaviours. At the microsystem level, digital platforms provide immediate means of partner surveillance, whereas within the macrosystem, cultural narratives that equate romantic vigilance with devotion normalise such actions. The strong predictive power of behavioural jealousy for monitoring reflects this interplay such that jealous impulses are reinforced by social and technological environments that make digital intrusion both accessible and socially rationalised. Conversely, emotional jealousy's inverse relationship with cyber dating abuse perpetration may indicate resilience factors at other ecological levels (e.g., supportive peers, relational communication norms) that facilitate adaptive regulation.

Previous studies suggest that cognitive jealousy and behavioural jealousy tend to occur simultaneously (Attridge, 2013; Elphinston et al., 2013), with both of them being significant predictors of psychological and relational cyber dating abuse (Bhogal et al., 2025; Ramírez-Carrasco et al., 2023). Our findings, however, show that cognitive jealousy did not significantly predict all measures of cyber dating abuse perpetration. One potential reason for this discrepancy

could be that the participants in our study might appraise jealousy in different ways, such as a signal to improve communication or relationship reflection rather than a trigger for aggression or control. As explained by Deans and Bhogal (2019), although people may have jealous thoughts, this does not necessarily mean they choose to express them, nor do they actually engage in abuse of a partner.

Our study also did not find significant predictive relationships between conformity to feminine norms and cyber dating abuse perpetration. An earlier study by Villora, Yubero, and Navarro (2019) has also reported similar results. Two possible explanations can be put forward to account for these findings. The first relates to how people perceive abusive behaviour. Villora, Yubero, and Navarro (2019) suggest that people may have the perception that controlling and monitoring are not abusive behaviour and, hence, they are normal occurrences that happen between couples. The second explanation could be due to the nature of gender norms. It might be argued that because feminine norms focus on nurturing, modesty, relational harmony, and emotional support (Bem, 1993), they do not inherently promote power assertion or aggression. In turn, these norms make it less likely for women to engage in abusive behaviours, including digital ones. This is in contrast to masculine norms, which tend to predict relationship abuse more consistently. These norms, which emphasise assertiveness, competition, and dominance, are often tied to power dynamics, hierarchical relationships, and abusive actions (Eagly & Wood, 2012; Lian, 2018). As a consequence, these norms are more likely to be used to justify the exercise of power and control in relationships, including cyber dating abuse.

Moreover, the non-significance of feminine-norm indicators suggests that gendered regulation processes operate more subtly, in the sense that they are embedded in broader social expectations rather than in self-reported adherence to specific traits. From a feminist theoretical perspective, our findings highlight how women's perpetration of cyber dating abuse must be understood within gendered cultural scripts that define appropriate expressions of emotion and power in intimate relationships. Traditional Malay femininity emphasises emotional restraint, relational maintenance, and moral responsibility for relationship harmony. Within such norms, digital monitoring may not be perceived as aggression but as relational care or moral vigilance. This interpretation supports feminist arguments that women's relational control behaviours often emerge from attempts to preserve emotional bonds or reassert agency within constrained social expectations rather than from dominance motives. The lack of significant direct effects for conformity to feminine norms suggests that these cultural scripts may shape how behaviours are justified and interpreted, rather than directly predicting who engages in cyber dating abuse. From Bronfenbrenner's (1979) socioecological perspective too, the absence of strong direct effects for gender-norm variables does not imply irrelevance. Rather, it suggests that macro-level cultural forces may influence cyber dating abuse indirectly through the interpersonal and emotional contexts in which jealousy arises and is expressed. To this end, further research is required.

## IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings of this study contribute to the literature in three ways. First, they add to the existing knowledge since, to date, no research exists that has examined the roles that jealousy and conformity to feminine norms play in perpetrating cyber dating abuse among Malay women. More specifically, the present study demonstrates that behavioural jealousy was the consistent and strong predictor of perpetrating all components of cyber dating abuse, while emotional jealousy

significantly, albeit inversely, correlated with perpetrating cyber dating abuse in general and with direct aggression in particular. In sum, this study extends our understanding of the factors that contribute to the perpetration of cyber dating abuse within the context of Malay culture.

The findings from this study may inform relevant stakeholders, such as government agencies, non-governmental organisations, and mental health practitioners, on the future development of interventions in mitigating cyber dating abuse. Most of the existing interventions for dating violence have focused on providing support to female victims as opposed to male victims (Martinez-Soto & Ibabe, 2024), which may not be suitable for female perpetrators who seek interventions to better understand or improve their behaviour. Perhaps in one way or another, our findings could be useful in developing appropriate strategies that can help individuals to be more aware of abusive behaviour, especially in digital spheres, and reduce the feeling of jealousy to prevent them from abusing their partner.

Finally, romantic jealousy and conformity to feminine norms are not much discussed within the context of cyber dating abuse, especially among Malay women. Given their relatively new position in digital relationships, our study generated empirical evidence for the idea and psychometric operationalisation of the three scales used in this study, i.e., the Cyber Dating Abuse Questionnaire (Borrajao et al., 2015), the Multidimensional Jealousy Scale (Pfeiffer & Wong, 1989), and the Conformity to Feminine Norms Inventory-45 (Parent & Moradi, 2010), on Malay women samples. Furthermore, the findings can serve as a reference for other researchers to uncover more about conformity to feminine norms in digital relationships. The fact that we did not find conformity to feminine norms to be a significant predictor of cyber dating abuse in this study points out the need for more data and research about gender norms, especially those with culturally more distant ethnic backgrounds.

Despite the insights gained, the findings of this study should be considered in light of their limitations. One of them was that the study relies on self-report measures, which may be subject to response biases, such as social desirability. As such, multi-method approaches are recommended in future research as they can minimise the problems caused by method variance. Another limitation of the study was its small sample size, which could neither represent the population nor make up for any potential bias. This limitation decreases the generalisability of the findings but suggests the need to explore the relationships among the variables further. Finally, the study is cross-sectional in nature, which means we cannot be certain whether jealousy causes cyber dating abuse perpetration or whether individuals who engage in cyber dating abuse are more likely to be jealous, and vice versa. Longitudinal studies would be needed to examine the causal relationship in this respect.

## CONCLUSION

The key learning from the present study is that jealousy behaviours are prevalent in Malay women who perpetrate cyber dating abuse, but particularly so among those high in behavioural jealousy and emotional jealousy. This finding implies that both are important aspects of jealousy that can drive a person, in this context, a woman, to engage in the direct aggression and control of a romantic partner. With regard to gender norms, we did not find evidence to support the association between conformity to feminine norms and cyber dating abuse perpetration, probably due to our limited sample size. However, it does not mean that this variable should be disregarded in further research on cyber dating abuse behaviours. Given the detrimental impact of cyber dating abuse,



more studies are needed to explore or confirm various factors related to this behaviour, especially in different settings and populations.

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