



Assessment Of Cyberbullying Incidence In Online Social Networks In Nigeria

(A Case Study Of Students In Higher Institutions In Nassarawa State, Nigeria)

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ABSTRACT

The study assessed cyberbullying incidence in online social networks in Nigeria. This study employed a descriptive survey research design. The population of the study consisted of Federal University Lafia, Nasarawa State Polytechnic, and Nasarawa State University, Keffi. A purposive sampling technique was used to select 5 high institutions in Nasarawa state. Snowball sampling was employed to select respondents. The sample size of the study was 203. The questionnaire for data collection. Data was analysed using descriptive statistics of frequency, percentages, mean, and standard deviation. Chi-square will be used to test the hypotheses at the 0.05 level of significance. The findings revealed that the respondents were aware of cyberbullying, with a grand mean of 3.1. Further, the causes of cyberbullying included internet addiction, social anxiety, anger and frustration, social influences, and use of social media. The respondents experience different forms of cyberbullying (M=2.58). The effects of cyberbullying include low self-esteem, suicidal attempts, anger, frustration, invasion of privacy, drop in academic performance, and post-traumatic stress disorder. The study concluded that cyberbullying is rampant among students and has effects on them. The study recommended, among others creation of awareness campaigns should be reinforced through workshops, seminars, and digital literacy programs to educate students on prevention and response strategies of cyberbullying. Institutions studied should promote responsible social media use and provide counselling services to help students manage frustration and reduce excessive internet dependency. The government should implement strict policies against online harassment, create safe reporting channels, and establish support groups for affected students.

Keywords: Cyberbullying, awareness, and social networks

INTRODUCTION

The emergence of modern technologies, particularly Information and Communication Technology (ICT), has significantly transformed human interaction trends. Technologies such as smartphones, social networking applications, multimedia tools, and web-based platforms have created profound changes in how individuals connect and communicate, especially among youth. According to Alanko *et al.*, (2023), nearly 78% of students own at least one form of electronic media, including cell phones, computers, and

other internet-enabled devices. This trend facilitates efficient learning, teaching, and communication while simultaneously introducing significant social challenges, such as cyberbullying.

Cyberbullying is an emerging issue globally, particularly among young people, due to increased access to the internet and online social networks. Chan *et al* (2021) define cyberbullying as bullying that occurs through the use of electronic technology, while Yu & Riddle (2022) describe it as intentionally sending harmful or aggressive content online to harass, threaten, or humiliate others. Cyberbullying encompasses various actions such as sending malicious messages, sharing embarrassing images, impersonating individuals, and excluding victims from online groups (Abaido, 2020). Unlike traditional bullying, cyberbullying often allows anonymity, enabling perpetrators to act without immediate consequences. This anonymity, combined with the vast reach of the internet, makes cyberbullying more pervasive and damaging.

Globally, studies demonstrate the growing prevalence of cyberbullying. For instance, research in Sweden, Finland and the United States (Patchin & Hinduja, 2021) highlights that cyberbullying has emerged as a widespread problem, transcending national boundaries. A cross-national study conducted in Italy, England, and Spain further emphasizes the extent of cyberbullying across regions (Peck *et al*, 2023).

In Nigeria, cyberbullying is also increasingly prevalent, particularly among youths and students who are active users of social networking sites. The Nigerian Communication Commission (NCC) reported 76 million broadband subscriptions and 195 million active phone lines as of December 2021, reflecting the vast number of internet users in the country. This growth has inadvertently contributed to cyberbullying incidents, as many Nigerian youths now use online platforms to engage socially and academically (Olasanmi, *et al*, 2020).

Empirical evidence from Nigeria reveals alarming trends. Mustapha *et al.*, (2022) discovered that 39.8% of respondents in their study had experienced cyberbullying, with phone calls, chat rooms, and text messages being the most common harassment platforms. Irabor and Osebor (2022) further reported significant levels of cyberbullying among secondary school students in Nigerian states, such as Oyo and Benue. Additionally, Olasanmi *et al.*, (2020) and Abaido (2020) affirm the frequent occurrence of cyberbullying in Nigerian schools, linking its rise to increased smartphone and internet access.

Among undergraduate students, cyberbullying remains a concerning issue. For instance, Nwosu, *et al.*, (2018) found that 50% of students at Nnamdi Azikwe University reported awareness of cyberbullying incidents, while Agustiningsih, Yusuf, and Ahsan (2023) reported that 80% of Library and Information Science students at Delta State University had witnessed or experienced cyberbullying on social media platforms. These studies reveal that cyberbullying incidents are prevalent in Nigerian universities and occur predominantly via social networks such as Facebook, WhatsApp, and Instagram.

Cyberbullying has far-reaching psychological, emotional, and academic consequences for students. Kamanthi (2024) identified several adverse effects of cyberbullying, including decreased academic performance, increased absenteeism, truancy, and a heightened risk of school dropout. Victims often suffer from frustration, low self-esteem, anxiety, depression, and suicidal thoughts (Kamanthi, 2024). In a study by Okoie *et al.*, (2015), cyberbullying significantly affected adolescents' self-esteem, self-concept, and self-efficacy, demonstrating the profound psychological damage cyberbullying causes. The emotional distress experienced by victims can persist for years, resulting in avoidance behaviors and impaired academic performance (Chan *et al.*, 2021).

Furthermore, due to the pervasive nature of online networks, victims of cyberbullying often feel trapped and powerless, as the bullying continues beyond the confines of school into their private lives. This emotional toll can lead to aggressive behavior, substance abuse, and other risky coping mechanisms (Karwowski, 2019). Hence, cyberbullying presents a significant public health and academic concern that requires urgent attention, particularly among Nigerian undergraduate students.

Globally, measures to combat cyberbullying include anti-bullying laws, digital safety campaigns, and educational programs that promote online ethics (Patchin & Hinduja, 2021; Peck *et al.*, 2023). In Nigeria, however, efforts to address cyberbullying are still limited. Adediran (2020) noted that cyberbullying cases in Nigeria often go unreported, making it difficult to ascertain its prevalence and impact accurately. While

empirical studies such as those by Nwosu *et al.* (2018) and Aliyu (2022) have shed light on the issue, more research is needed to assess the incidence and patterns of cyberbullying among Nigerian students.

Problem Statement

Despite growing global awareness of cyberbullying and its associated risks, reliable data regarding its incidence in Nigeria remains scarce. Existing research (Owoade *et al.*, 2023) has highlighted the prevalence of cyberbullying, particularly among students, but such studies are fragmented and lack national coverage. Kehinde, & Dipeolu (2023) reported that 39.8% of their respondents had experienced electronic bullying, while 21% admitted to being both victims and perpetrators. These figures, though significant, represent isolated cases and point to a larger, unquantified problem in Nigeria. Adediran (2020) asserts that cyberbullying occurs in Nigeria, as in other nations, but the absence of systematic reporting and accurate data hinders efforts to understand its full scope and impact.

Furthermore, the lack of awareness and reporting mechanisms for cyberbullying incidents in Nigeria compounds the issue. Victims often remain silent due to fear, stigma, or a perceived lack of recourse, thereby perpetuating the cycle of harassment (Adediran, 2020). The cultural and societal attitudes towards online harassment, coupled with inadequate legal frameworks to address cyberbullying, further exacerbate the problem.

Research Questions

1. What is the level of awareness of cyberbullying among students in higher institutions in Nasarawa state?
2. What are the causes of cyberbullying among students in higher institutions in Nasarawa state?
3. What are the forms of cyberbullying experienced by students in higher institutions in Nasarawa state?
4. What are the effects of cyberbullying on students in higher institutions in Nasarawa state?
5. What is the relationship between awareness and forms of cyberbullying experienced?

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of the study is the assessment of cyberbullying incidence in online social networks in Nigeria. The specific objectives are to:

1. Level of awareness of cyberbullying among students in higher institutions in Nasarawa state
2. Identify causes of cyberbullying among students in high institutions in Nasarawa state
3. Examine the forms of cyberbullying experienced by students in higher institutions in Nasarawa State
4. Know the effects of cyberbullying on students in higher institutions in Nasarawa state
5. Determine the relationship between awareness and forms of cyberbullying experienced

Research Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses will be tested at 0.05 level of significance

H0₁: There is no significant relationship between awareness and cyberbullying experienced

H0₂: There is no significant relationship between cyberbullying experienced and effects

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Research Design: This study employed a descriptive survey research design. Specifically, a cross-sectional survey design will be used. The design allows for a comprehensive exploration of both the measurable and contextual aspects of cyberbullying.

Population: The population for this study includes users of online social networks, particularly focusing on students in higher institutions in Nasarawa state, which include Federal University Lafiya, Nasarawa State Polytechnic, and Nasarawa State University, Keffi, who are the most active demographic in social media usage and are often targeted by or engage in cyberbullying.

Sampling technique: A purposive sampling technique was used to select 5 high institutions in Nasarawa state. Snowball sampling will be employed to select respondents. The sample size of the study was 203.

Data collection method: The researcher used a questionnaire as the instrument for data collection.

Data Analysis: The data collected for the study were analysed using descriptive statistics, mean, and standard deviation. While inferential statistics will be used to test the hypotheses. All will be done with

the use of the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) 20.0 version. Findings will be presented using tables. Chi-square will be used to test the hypotheses at the 0.05 level of significance. The mean benchmark for decision-making will be 3.0.

Literature Review

In a study, Aliyu (2022) assessed the modes, levels, consequences and causal factors of cyberbullying in selected tertiary institutions in Nigeria. It also revealed high consequences of cyberbullying, including social distance, psychological trauma, dropping out of school, or being expelled. The majority of the students confirmed being aware of cyberbullying on campus. Some revealed that they participated in seeing, sharing, and forwarding offensive messages and explicit pictures of others on social media. The significant consequences are for the affected student to drop from school and cut relationships/friendships with former schoolmates. The main causal factor of cyberbullying identified on campus is breaking off from a relationship or cheating on dates. In another study, Agustiniingsih *et al.*, (2023) determined the type of cyberbullying experienced by adolescents. The finding revealed the types of cyberbullying most experienced by adolescents sequentially, to be harassment, Exclusion, Flaming, Cyberstalking, outing, impersonation and denigration.

Bashir *et al.*, (2022) examined the causes and prevalence of cyberbullying victimization amongst the undergraduate students of University of Maiduguri Borno state Nigeria. The findings revealed that, undergraduate students engaged in cyber bullying more often than not, this increased the number of victimization among students of which most of the times go unreported due to the fear of stigmatization. The report indicated that 48% of students are involved in cyber bullying due to frustration and sometimes just for fun, while, 40%, of the perpetrators of the cyber bullying indulged in the act due to frustration caused by either school pressure or family. Mahanta and Khatoniyar (2019) undertook a study to find out the association between cyber-bullying and mental health issues of adolescents. The study reveals that the majority of the student population have been victims or have witnessed cyberbullying and have been involved in bullying others. There is a strong association between cyberbullying and degrading mental health of adolescents.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table I: Awareness of Cyberbullying

Items	Very aware	Aware	Moderately aware	Not aware	X
When I am online, I know my personal information may be stolen by others	74(41.3%)	65(36.3%)	16(8.9%)	24(13.4%)	3.06
I know my personal information may be misused by others on social networking sites (e.g. Facebook, Twitter).	82(45.8%)	55(30.7%)	33(18.4%)	9(5.0%)	3.17
I, sometimes, feel necessary to take measures to prevent other people from harming me in virtual environments	70(39.1%)	71(39.7%)	29(16.2%)	9(5.0%)	3.13
When I am online, I reckon a computer pirate (e.g. hacker, cracker, lamer) may pose threats for me as well	86(48.0%)	49(27.4%)	15(8.4%)	29(16.2%)	3.07
I know that anyone, who wishes to harm me, can do it using the Internet, social network	73(40.8%)	64(35.8%)	38(21.2%)	4(2.2%)	3.15
I, know there is a risk for my private photographs or visuals to be shared online without my permission	85(47.5%)	71(39.7%)	19(10.6%)	4(2.2%)	3.32
I Know there may be false rumors about me shared in virtual environments.	71(39.7%)	69(38.5%)	27(15.1%)	12(6.7%)	3.11
When I am online, I keep in mind that the Internet may also be used to harm other people	90(50.3%)	71(39.7%)	3(1.7%)	15(8.4%)	3.32
I never communicate with people by whom I may be threatened via social networks	54(30.2%)	69(38.5%)	25(14.0%)	31(17.3%)	2.82
I, sometimes think about what I would do if false information about myself were shared on a social network	59(33.0%)	74(41.3%)	34(19.0%)	12(6.7%)	3.01
Cluster mean					3.11

The mean scores for the awareness of online security risks indicate that respondents generally recognize potential threats in virtual environments. The highest mean scores (3.32) are observed in two items: awareness that private photographs or visuals could be shared online without permission, and the understanding that the internet may also be used to harm others. These findings suggest that respondents are particularly conscious of risks related to privacy breaches and the potential misuse of digital platforms. Additionally, high awareness is reflected in concerns about personal information misuse on social networking sites (3.17) and the necessity of taking protective measures in virtual environments (3.13). However, the item with the lowest mean score (2.82) pertains to avoiding communication with potentially threatening individuals on social networks, indicating a relatively lower level of caution in this aspect. The results demonstrate a strong awareness of cyberbullying, with a grand mean of 3.1. The findings agreed with Aliyu (2022) assessed the modes, levels, consequences, and causal factors of

cyberbullying in selected tertiary institutions in Nigeria and found that the majority of the students confirmed being aware of cyberbullying on campus.

Table II: Causes of cyberbullying

Items	Yes	No
Internet addiction	153(85.5%)	26(14.5%)
Social Anxiety	139(77.7%)	40(22.3%)
Anger and frustration	102(57.0%)	77(43.0%)
Social influences	130(72.6%)	49(27.4%)
Use of Social Media	179(100%)	0

The findings on the causes of cyberbullying indicate that the use of social media is perceived as a universal factor, with all respondents (100%) agreeing that it contributes to cyberbullying. This highlights the significant role social media platforms play in facilitating or amplifying online harassment. Internet addiction is identified as the second most common cause, with 85.5% of respondents acknowledging its influence. This suggests that excessive internet use may lead to problematic online behaviors, including cyberbullying. Similarly, social anxiety (77.7%) and social influences (72.6%) are also recognized as major contributing factors, implying that individuals who struggle with social interactions or are influenced by peer behavior may be more prone to engaging in or being victims of cyberbullying. Trait anger, with the lowest agreement (57.0%), still represents a notable factor, indicating that individuals with a tendency toward anger may be more likely to engage in hostile online interactions. The finding agreed with Bashir, Ibrahim, and Saidu (2022) who examined the causes and prevalence of cyberbullying victimization amongst the undergraduate students of University of Maiduguri Borno state Nigeria and found that 48% of students are involved in cyber bullying due to frustration and sometimes just for fun, while, 40%, of the perpetrators of the cyber bullying indulged in the act due to frustration caused by either school pressure or family.

Table III: Forms of cyberbullying

Forms of cyberbullying	Very often	often	Sometimes	Rarely	Not at all	X
I have received mean messages on the social networks which made me uncomfortable	35(19.6%)	35(19.6%)	67(37.4%)	15(8.4%)	27(15.1%)	3.20
Someone has said mean things about me on instant messengers or in chat rooms to upset me.	29(16.2%)	46(25.7%)	48(26.8%)	21(11.7%)	35(19.6%)	3.07
Someone has posted hurtful messages about me on Facebook or Twitter to damage my reputation	14(7.8%)	47(26.3%)	18(10.1%)	11(6.1%)	89(49.7%)	2.36
I have been sent threatening statements via social networks which made me insecure.	13(7.3%)	21(11.7%)	44(24.6%)	7(3.9%)	94(52.5%)	2.17
I have received insulting online messages from someone repeatedly	15(8.4%)	23(12.8%)	80(44.7%)	0	61(34.1%)	2.17
I have experienced exclusion	19(10.6%)	41(22.9%)	60(33.5%)	15(8.4%)	44(24.6%)	2.61

I have continued to receive mean even after I have asked the sender to stop	79(44.1%)	22(12.3%)	32(17.9%)	42(23.5%)	4(2.2%)	2.87
People have said mean things about me on websites repeatedly to embarrass me	21(11.7%)	30(16.8%)	30(16.8%)	11(6.1%)	87(48.6%)	2.27
I have received intentional messages from someone that made me upset	89(49.7%)	47(26.3%)	18(10.1%)	11(6.1%)	14(7.8%)	2.37
I have been blocked in a chat room by other people who want to make me angry.	19(10.6%)	41(22.9%)	60(33.5%)	15(8.4%)	44(24.6%)	2.61
Someone has blocked me on an instant messenger to upset me	15(8.4%)	0	80(44.7%)	23(12.8%)	61(34.1%)	2.17
I have been excluded from online community groups which made me feel left out	54(30.2%)	69(38.5%)	25(14.0%)	31(17.3%)	0	2.82
People have cooperatively excluded me from online community groups to make me feel left out.	79(44.1%)	22(12.3%)	32(17.9%)	42(23.5%)	4(2.2%)	2.87
cluster mean						2.58

The mean scores for the different forms of cyberbullying experienced indicate that respondents have faced various degrees of online harassment. The highest mean score (3.20) is associated with receiving mean messages on social networks, suggesting that verbal aggression through digital platforms is a prevalent experience. Similarly, mean comments on instant messaging platforms (3.07) and continued harassment despite requests to stop (2.87) are also notable concerns, indicating that many individuals have encountered persistent online abuse. On the other hand, the lowest mean scores (2.17) are observed in receiving repeated insulting messages, being blocked on instant messengers to cause distress, and receiving direct threats via social networks. This suggests that while online exclusion and mean-spirited messages are common, direct threats and persistent insults may be less frequent. The grand mean of 2.58 indicates that, on average, respondents experience cyberbullying occasionally rather than frequently. The findings agreed with Agustiningsih, Yusuf, and Ahsan (2023) who determined the type of cyberbullying experienced by adolescents and found the types of cyberbullying most experienced by adolescents sequentially, to be harassment, Exclusion, Flaming, Cyberstalking, outing, impersonation, and denigration.

Table IV: Effects of Cyberbullying

Effects	Yes	No
Low self esteem	124(69.3%)	55(30.7%)
Suicidal attempt	100(55.9%)	79(44.1%)
Anger	126(70.4%)	53(29.6%)
Frustration	129(72.1%)	50(27.9%)
Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)	109(60.9%)	70(39.1%)
Invasion of privacy	126(70.4%)	53(29.6%)
Drop in academic performance	100(55.9%)	79(44.1%)

The findings on the effects of cyberbullying reveal that a significant number of respondents have experienced psychological and emotional distress as a result of online harassment. Frustration (72.1%) and anger (70.4%) are the most commonly reported effects, indicating that cyberbullying often leads to heightened emotional responses. Similarly, invasion of privacy (70.4%) and low self-esteem (69.3%) are also prevalent, suggesting that victims may feel violated and suffer from diminished self-worth. Notably, 60.9% of respondents reported experiencing post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), highlighting the long-term psychological impact of cyberbullying. Additionally, more than half of the respondents admitted to suicidal attempts (55.9%) and a decline in academic performance (55.9%), underscoring the severe consequences that cyberbullying can have on mental health and overall well-being. The findings agreed with Mahanta and Khatoniyar (2019), who undertook a study to find out the association between cyberbullying and mental health issues of adolescents and found is a strong association between cyberbullying and degrading mental health of adolescents.

Table V: Chi-Square test for relationship between awareness and cyberbullying

Test Statistics		
	Awareness	Cyberbullying experience
Chi-Square	83.598 ^a	73.469 ^b
df	16	23
Asymp. Sig.	.000	.000

The asymptotic significance (Asymp. Sig.) for both variables is .000, which is below the standard significance threshold of 0.05. This means that the null hypothesis, which states that there is no significant relationship between awareness and cyberbullying experience, is rejected.

Table VI: Chi-Square test for cyberbullying e and effects

Test Statistics		
	Cyberbullying	Effects
Chi-Square	73.469 ^a	109.955 ^b
df	23	6
Asymp. Sig.	.000	.000

The asymptotic significance (Asymp. Sig.) for both variables is .000, which is below the conventional significance level of 0.05. This leads to the rejection of the null hypothesis, confirming that there is a significant relationship between experiencing cyberbullying and its psychological, emotional, and academic effects.

CONCLUSION

The study investigated cyberbullying incidence in online social networks in Nigeria and revealed that most of the students are aware of cyberbullying incidents, and they agreed to the fact that cyberbullying has diverse effects, such as low self-esteem, frustration, PTSD, or a decline in academic performance, emphasizing the need for proactive intervention strategies to mitigate these effects. There was a significant relationship between awareness and cyberbullying and its effects. The study concluded that students in the studied institutions experience cyberbullying in diverse ways.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made:

1. Awareness campaigns should be reinforced through workshops, seminars, and digital literacy programs to educate students on prevention and response strategies of cyberbullying
2. Institutions studied should promote responsible social media use and provide counselling services to help students manage frustration and reduce excessive internet dependency.
3. The government should implement strict policies against online harassment, create safe reporting channels, and establish support groups for affected students.

4. Psychological support services, including counselling and peer mentoring, should be made available to help victims cope with the negative effects of cyberbullying

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