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Cyberbullying And Its Effects On Secondary School Students Educational And Social Development In Rivers State

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ABSTRACT

Cyberbullying as a social menace is the unwarranted use of information and communication device such as the internet and mobile phones, this are used in sending messages in the form of text message, audio recording, pictures and videos to harass and intimidate the person. Cyberbullying takes various forms such as flaming, harassment, cyber-staking, masquerades, denigration, and impersonation among others. Cyberbullying has a link with low self-esteem as most individuals that indulge in this act may not have any connection with the individual. Cyberbullying is associated with interpersonal problems that revolve around integration into the social environment, forming a support network, and managing new social freedoms which are enough to keep the victim socially withdrawn from other people. Cyberbullying is often found around individuals that exhibit these traits such anxiety, depression, feelings of alienation, reduced concentration, and suicidal thoughts. The effects of cyber bullying among secondary schools are manifested in various ways which include absenteeism, violence, low self-esteem, and poor academic performance. Hence The following suggestions are to protect the learners from the effects of cyber bullying: Regular enlightenment campaigns by the school counselors through posters, debates, seminars and further enlightenment through WhatsApp group messages to educate the parents and guardians on the dangers of cyberbullying among students. An anti-cyberbullying week should be included in the Rivers state academic calendar alongside the already on-going anti-bullying week across secondary schools in Rivers state. Classroom teachers should be involved in fighting this menace by referring culprits in their respective classes to the school counselor and a further disciplinary action against the rebellious students.

Keywords: Cyberbullying, social development, educational development, information and communication devices, students, secondary school

INTRODUCTION

The issue of bullying has drawn much attention from the public in the recent past due to its prevalence as a foremost basis of violence across the globe. Cases of bullying abound in the recent past in some secondary schools in Nigeria. Adeyemi (2021) states that bullying is an ugly social phenomenon that needs urgent attention. Research has shown that school bullying really impacts the victim's psychological, cognitive, and social development. By implication, teaching and learning can be greatly hindered in a school environment where its atmosphere of serenity is punctured, and which does not guarantee the progress of

the staff and students. Hence, the need to curb bullying in schools for the safety of both the students and their teachers due to its detrimental effects on the victims. Bullying results from a direct or indirect form of aggression targeted at another individual of unequal strength which can manifest in physical or verbal forms. Bullying can be in a direct form such as physical and verbal attacks or indirect form such as social exclusion/spreading of rumors. Explicitly, the physical form of bullying can result from hitting, pushing, shoving, and assault; the verbal form of bullying can manifest in insults, derogatory names, and threats while social forms include exclusion from peer groups and the spread of rumors, Nwafor (2022).

Cyberbullying as a social menace has been variously defined by different scholars; but all the definitions point to the same fact that it has to do with unwarranted harassment or intimidation using various information technologies. For instance, Lei (2019) construed cyberbullying as superordinate for hostile actions involving continuous and deliberate harm to either individuals or groups over digital devices. In a similar manner, Fadili (2022) averaged that cyberbullying is a diverting route taken by users of digital technologies to release bottled-up, toxic, and negative energy. Cuncic (2021) asserted that because digital technologies are the major channel of cyberbullying, both the bullies and the bullied have their meeting point in digital space. He further posited that five criteria are usually consistent with the manifestation of cyberbullying such as intention to harm, repetition of the obnoxious actions, power imbalance, anonymity of the bully, and publicity of the humiliating actions.

Cuncic (2021) states that cyberbullying takes various forms which include flaming, online harassment, denigration, exclusion, outing/doxing, catfishing, and impersonation. Others include trolling, spreading false rumors, name-calling, sending explicit messages or images without the consent of the victim, and cyberstalking. In their studies with secondary students. Bashir, Ibrahim & Saidu (2022) found that 48% of students got involved in cyberbullying due to frustration but sometimes just for fun, while 40% admitted that they got involved in cyberbullying out of frustration arising from either family-based or school-related pressure. Cyberbullying could also arise from exposure to violent media, peer pressure, boredom, low self-esteem and sheer jealousy. From every indication, therefore, cyberbullying can also be referred to as online or electronic bullying.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Cyberbullying is a form of bullying that involves the use of digital devices to intimidate, harass, coerce, threaten, molest, or stalk another individual on the other end of the digital platform. Sighn & Sighn, (2020) states that cyberbullying occurs in cyberspace through social media handles, and online sites such as the mobile phone, the internet, emails, and other information technologies that students always access. The use of cyberspace makes for ease of communication with friends and forming networks for academic interactions without limits. The advent of the digital era with the consequent increased rate of social media usage among the populace, especially the youth birthed and strengthened aggressive behaviors in cyberspace. For instance, Singh & Dhillon (2020) reported that over 4 billion of the populaces are exposed to and equally make use of online means of communication and education; while Okeke & Anierobi (2020) observed that exposure to some social media sites promotes aggressive behaviors among the users. This exposure to cyberspace coupled with the fact that it entails anonymity of the users could no doubt have paved way for bullying behaviors.

In the Nigerian context, statistics revealed that cyberbullying is widespread among students. For instance, Podia & Joshi (2022) generally reported that 59% of adolescents in Nigeria have been cyberbullied. Other studies conducted in different parts of Nigeria also aligned with the general statistics. Olasanmi, Agbaje & Adeyemi (2020) in their study reported that 53.9% of the sampled students for their study from a school in the western part of Nigeria had experienced cyberbullying while 24.1% admitted that they had bullied others in cyberspace. In a study conducted by Nwosu (2018) in a university in the eastern part of Nigeria, it was reported that 48% to 57% of the undergraduates used for the study had been bullied on cyberspace while a range of 28.6% to 40.0% had bullied others through social media sites. Musa (2019) conducted a study with undergraduate students in a school in Northern Nigeria which showed that 74.4% of the participants had engaged in cyberbullying using either the internet or mobile phones. The above statistics showed that students in every part of Nigeria had experienced cyberbullying at one time or the other.

Nigerian secondary school students, use the internet for various purposes ranging from academic to social purposes. Most students spend many hours daily on the internet to the point of occasionally getting addicted to it. Unachukwu, Ebenebe & Nwosu (2021) asserted that the reason behind the constant use of digital technologies by children was that they are readily available to them. Singh & Sighn (2020) observed that the victims of cyberbullying experienced negative psychological distress such as anxiety, depression, fear, and exhibited a low level of self-esteem, and had low academic achievement. Li, Wu, & Hesketh (2023) showed that victims of cyberbullying exhibited vulnerability to psychosocial and psychosomatic disorders. Peled (2019) observed that cyberspace bullying has an impact on the bullied in some ways such as in their academic, social, and emotional development.

SUMMARY OF LITERATURE REVIEW

Cyberbullying involves hurting someone using information and communication technology. This may include sending messages through the Internet or text, posting hurtful comments on a social networking site, posting humiliating pictures, or intimidating and threatening someone electronically. Cyberbullying is unique because it reaches an unlimited audience across time and space. Inspiring its usefulness in transmitting information, it does have its negative effects as far as students' educational and social development are concerned. Literature has reported its challenges in the usage of communicating hurtful and painful messages, distracting them from their academic work. Therefore, it is very important that the awareness of cyberbullying and its attendant consequences should be the duty of counselors, school administrators, teachers, parents, guardians and the state ministry of education, because of its mental, emotional and psychosocial consequences among secondary school students.

Forms of Cyberbullying

Cyber bullying through mobile phones or online may take various forms, for instance sending malicious messages or text messages, messages of a sexual nature known as sexting or sending pictures or videos of someone with intention of distributing the content to others. In some situations, individuals may impersonate others online or create false profiles with which to perpetuate cyber aggression. Cyberbullying can be indirect or direct.

Li (2020) reported that cyber bullying can take various forms:

- Flaming: sending angry, rude, vulgar messages directed to a person or persons privately or to an online group;
- Harassment: repeatedly sending a person offensive message;
- Cyber- stalking: harassment that include threats of harm or is highly intimidating;
- Denigration (put-down: sending or posting harmful untrue or cruel statements about a person to other people;
- Masquerade: Pretending to be someone else and sending or posting material that makes that person look bad or places that person in a potential danger;
- Outing and trickery: sending or posting material about a person that contains sensitive, private or embarrassing information, including forwarding private messages or images. Engaging in tricks to solicit embarrassing information that is then made public;
- Exclusion: Acts that specifically exclude a person from an online group.

Relationship between Cyberbullying, Gender, and Age

Scholars in different regions had studied the role gender plays in engaging in bullying and bullying-related behaviors. For instance, Kwaku (2022) observed that bullying was prevalent among the participants in their study within the northern region of Nigeria, irrespective of gender. Kwaku reported explicitly that out of 230 adolescent males, 73.0% and out of 196 females, 61.3% had been bullied within a space of one year. Lei (2019) implied that gender is not a factor in cyberbullying as shown in their report that gender did not moderate the relationship between self-esteem and cyberbullying. By implication, being a male or a female did not stop the participants from experiencing bullying in cyberspace. Similarly. Ali & Shahbuddin (2022) showed that gender was not a factor in cyberbullying, reporting that 49.1% of the students in their study representing about half of the total sample had been bullied within a time interval of three years. In their study, Gascó & Mónaco (2019) revealed a gender

difference in cyberbullying behaviours with boys as more cyberbullies than their female counterparts. Ghansah, (2022) conducted a study in Ghana, which revealed that gender was not a significant factor in cyberbullying, but age and level of education were found to be significant factors. In terms of age, Ghansan (2022) reported that a significant relationship exists between cyberbullying and age.

Cyberbullying and Social Development

Every human being by nature is a social being. Socialization starts from the nucleus of one's family where the child had initial contact with significant others under whose tutelage, cultural norms, values, and etiquettes are taught, and basic relationships are formed. This relationship leads to a level of attachment between the child and the significant others. According to Erikson's theory of social development, the individual during the period of infancy develops basic trust or mistrust depending on the existing relationship cum socialization process of the child. As the child grows into the young adulthood stage, craving and the quest for socialization through peer affiliations set in which breeds either intimacy or isolation. This craving to form and enjoy social relationships outside the enclaves of the family is one of the factors that lead young adults to cyberspace. Unachukwu (2021) subtly implied that overly occupying oneself with social media can hamper social development leading to social withdrawal as a fall out of the range of psychosocial consequences of cyberbullying. This withdrawal may be heightened and sustained when bullying is involved. For instance, Peled (2019) observed that interpersonal problems were related to cyberbullying and such interpersonal problems revolve around integration into the social environment, forming a support network, and managing new social freedoms which are enough to keep the victim socially withdrawn. Social withdrawal is likely to negatively affect one's social development. Other scholars linked bullying to social withdrawal and social anxiety (Ardiavanti, Efendi, Kurnia and Hsieh, 2018), and by extension, the social lives of the victims are being affected as the victim feels depressed and anxious all the time.

An individual Self-esteem refers to an individual's general appraisal of self-worth or self-value. It is an important aspect of self-value revolving around one's features and abilities and can be affected by various factors including bullying and cyberbullying. Mabvurira & Machimbidza (2022) suggest that cyberbullying has a link with low self-esteem. In their study with children and adolescents in the USA, Asia and Europe. Lei (2019) showed a positive relationship between self-esteem and cyberbullying reporting that students with low self-esteem were more frequently engaged in cyberbullying than their counterparts with high self-esteem. Peled (2019) asserts that self-esteem problems were found to be significantly associated with cyberbullying. He further observed that cyberbullying increases via online devices, so also self-esteem-related problems increase. Although Lokithasan (2020) observed a negative relationship between self-esteem and cyberbullying, the relationship was not statistically significant. Interestingly, Mona & Marwa (2018) found that bullying has no significant relationship with students' self-esteem.

Cyberbullying and Mental Wellbeing

Mental health is very crucial to life and living. One needs a healthy mental and cognitive status to function effectively in society. Students need their mental health for proper adjustment both in school and society. A lot of studies have fingered cyberbullying as one of the sources of threats to the mental health of the victims. For instance, Ali & Shahbuddin (2022) reported that a significant negative relationship exists between cyberbullying and mental health among university students in Saudi Arabia asserting that the results clearly show that victims of cyberbullying experience emotional problems, such as worry, tension, and sadness. Liu & Zhou (2018) opine that cyberbullying has a link with depression and anxiety which no doubt can lead to disturbed mental wellness. Poudyal & Joshi (2021) rated in percentages some of the mental problems associated with cyberbullying as panic attacks at 23.20%, depression at 53.30%, trauma at 6.50%, and anxiety at 17%. Deductively, cyberbullying can be underscored as a critical factor in depression. Further to this, Ghansan (2022) linked cyberbullying to anxiety, depression, feelings of alienation, reduced concentration, and suicidal thoughts which generally pose threats to the mental health of the bullied. Asibong (2021) found that bullying has an adverse effect on the mental health of the victim which led some of them to commit sucide. Anierobi (2022) showed that bullying has a negative impact on the cognitive development of the victims. Thereby retarding their mental and psychological

development.

Effects of Cyber Bullying on Students Educational Development

Okoth (2019) observes that cyber bullying is brutal and causes social, physical, and psychological effects on the victims. Ngesu (2019) states that the effects of cyber bullying in secondary schools are manifested in various ways and include absenteeism, violence, low self-esteem, and poor academic performance.

Okoth (2019) has also cited low self-esteem and poor academic performance. Also, leavers who are bullied view the school as unsafe and also experience increased risk of depression and high rate of drug abuse. In addition, cyber bullying has also been described as a common form of aggression and violence that students engage in many secondary schools. Smith (2015) adds that low self-esteem tendencies tend to progress to adulthood. Studies have shown that some teenager students harassed by cyber bullies suffered depression, experienced education problems, and some committed suicide. Also bullying in general can lead to feelings of incompetence, alienation and depression, among the victims. Other cyber-bullying related effects include low self-esteem, family problems, academic problems, school violence, deliquescent behavior, and suicidal thoughts (Goodno, 2021). In the USA, for instance, several teenagers have committed suicide due to cyber bullying (Goodno, 2021).

Safana, (2016) states that psychological problems associated with cyber bullying include increased social anxiety, low self-esteem, depression, wide ranging mental health problems, drug abuse, poor adjustment, aggression, suicidal ideation, increased emotional distress, likelihood of acting out and other somatic symptoms. Li (2020) identifies other psychological harm inflicted by cyber bullying and includes low-self-esteem, school failure, anger, anxiety, depression, school avoidance or absenteeism, school violence and suicide. Safana & Li report similar psychological effects in some aspects. Smith (2015) reports of tragic incidences associated with cyber bullying such as self-harm and suicide. Other effects identified by Russell (2020) include depression and helplessness, lack of social competence, tendency to cry easily, having difficulties defending themselves from attack, low self- esteem and anxiety

Other studies have shown that cyber bullying victims exhibited decreased concentration, absenteeism, and poor academic achievement (Beran and Li, 2007). Many other studies have identified an association between cyber bullying and emotional, social and academic difficulties (Roland, 2021). Cyber bullying may also hinder the academic development of learners. Other consequences may include post-traumatic stress disorder, substance abuse, social, and personal relationship problems. Poor academic performance may be attributed to disruptions associated with mobile phone usage. Porter (2020) identify four factors that may link mobile usage, disruptions, and academic performance.

- Disruption in adolescent sleep patterns associated with cheap night calls;
- Time lost through prolonged sessions on social network sites;
- Harassment and bullying;
- Increased widespread access to pornography.

There is a concern regarding the time that young people spend on the internet and other social media platforms, and the risks of addictive behaviors. Internet and mobile phone usage have become compulsive among students, resulting in students spending less time on their schoolwork. Mobile phones were implicated for spreading cheap rumours that accelerated damage during the period of rampant unrest.

Cyber bullying is a serious phenomenon with a devastating effect on school students who are connected to the internet and/or social media networks and platforms. The effects identified in the literature can be a great source of worry to the parents, educators, and school administrators. It is therefore urgent that some firm steps or stands are taken to control this menace to protect school learners from the negative effects of cyber bullying.

Russell (2015) recommends that parents, school administrators and teacher can take the following steps to protect the learners from the effects of cyber bullying:

- Parents should make themselves available to speak with their children about school;
- Parents should monitor what their children are doing on the internet and nay other technology;
- Parents should keep an open dialogue with the school in case they do believe there has been an issue with cyber bullying involving their children;
- School administrators and teachers should keep an open dialogue with students so that they

feel safe talking about the subject.

Smith (2018), referring to South Africa, observes that, a firm stand is required to protect learners from the negative effects of cyber bullying. Raskanskas & Stoltz (2020) feel that a more practical strategy is to raise awareness among adults about the dangers of cyber bullying. They further recommend that cyber bullying should be included in school anti-bullying policies, anti-bullying materials, and teacher training materials for anti- bullying work. Besides, they recommend more specific interventions such as contacting mobile companies and internet service providers to reduce cyberbullying among adolescents.

Al-Zahrain (2015) talks about collaboration and educating parents, school personnel, and citizens in the community about cyber bullying. Besides, the schools have a critical role to play in reducing and controlling cyber bullying through the process of raising awareness. Hoff and Mitchell (2019) offer what they describe as a "three- pronged approach" for dealing with cyberbullying. The approach involves:

- Educating students and parents on the risks of virtual spaces and teach them the appropriate ways to protect students;
- Expanding schools, approaches towards cyber bullying by teaching students how to deal with social tensions and problems;
- Addressing legal cases related to cyber bullying and discussing interventions and possible solutions through professional networks such as conferences and professional associations.

Kowalski (2019) also provide a nine-element guide for students and parents on how to respond to cyber bullying:

- Save or print copies of nasty messages and websites as evidence;
- Ignore, delete or block the sender;
- Report fake or offensive profiles to the site host;
- Investigate and monitor children's online activities;
- Communicate with the school personnel and share evidence if the cyber bully is a student;
- Contact the cyber bully's guardian and share evidence if he or she is known
- Seek legal advice if the cyber bully's guardians are unresponsive;
- Report the cyber bully to the police;
- Seek help from a school counsellor or other mental health professional, if your child expresses emotional problems.

Other ways may include, fighting back; turning-off computers or mobile phone or block messages or profiles; changing email address or mobile phone numbers; ignoring it; asking them to stop keeping a record of nasty emails or messages and not responding to the threatening nasty email or other electronic messages.

THERAPEUTIC APPROACHES TO COUNTERACT CYBERBULLYING

Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy: This is a structured, goal-oriented type of therapy that challenges and modifies harmful beliefs and behaviors. CBT addresses the negative thought patterns associated with trauma of cyberbullying, teaching coping mechanisms and resilience- building strategies (Russell, 2015).

Dialectical Behavior Therapy: This is a form of cognitive behavioral therapy that emphasizes the psychosocial aspect. DBT impact skills to manage pain and negative emotions and improves the ability to handle distressing situations Allwell (2018)

Narrative Therapy: This therapeutic approach views people as authors of their own lives and aims to rewrite the narrative of their experience Donald (2018)

The victims of cyberbullying can rewrite their own stories, distancing themselves from the trauma, and reclaiming their identities.

Expressive therapy: These are therapies that use the arts or other forms of expression as part of the healing process. William (2017). Activities such as art, music, and dance can offer victims a channel to express and process their emotions and trauma.

Family Therapy: A type of psychological counseling that helps family members improve communication and resolve conflict. Addressing the effects of cyberbullying in a family setting ensures collective understanding and support.

Group Therapy: A form of psychotherapy involving one or more therapists working with several people simultaneously. Sharing experiences in a group setting can reduce feelings of isolation, allowing victims to share coping mechanisms and find mutual support.

THE ROLE OF SCHOOLS

Schools play a vital role in combating cyberbullying by:

- Implementing comprehensive anti-bullying policies.
- Conduct regular workshops for students, teachers, and parents.
- Establishing a reporting system for cyberbullying.

Through the school administrators and counsellors, awareness is created on the dangers of cyberbullying. Okafor (2017), states that Principals should organize seminars and conferences where experts will be invited to speak on the dangers of cyberbullying. The prevention of cyberbullying is essential. Cyber safety training is intended to educate individuals about the following:

- Recognizing Potential threats.
- Ensuring privacy settings on social media platforms.
- Reporting and blocking malicious users.

Nigeria has cyberbullying laws that can incriminate certain actions on social media thereby jailing those persons that disobey these laws. According to section 15 of Cybercrime Act in 2015:

"*Any person who, through a public electronic communication network persistently sends a message or other matter that is grossly offensive and indecent, falsely created to stir annoyance, hatred, ill-will, intimidation, insult, danger, inconvenience or anxiety would be liable to be convicted to a fine of not less than 2, 000,000.00 (2 million naira), imprisonment for at least one year or both fine and imprisonment*"

The Federal Government of Nigeria should utilize the media outlets such as Radio, Television and Internet to sensitize the public on the dangers of cyber bulling. Guidance and counsellors should be employed in secondary schools to counsel those students that have experienced one form of cyber bullying or the other.

CONCLUSION

With explosive rise of social media usage in Nigeria, there is a corresponding surge in online anti- social activity such as digital defamation privacy breaches and cyberbullying, which have brought havoc on the victims, mentally, emotionally, psychologically and socially. It is a crime in Nigeria as laws have been enacted against cyberbullying with its attendant consequences, the increase in cyberbullying due to increase in the accessibility of internet to most young persons. This makes young people utilize these platforms in spreading false information, uploading obnoxious videos, text messages, and thereby bullying their fellow classmates. It has become imperative that the Federal Government of Nigeria should establish Laws against cyber bulling to reduce the high rate of depression, stress and emotional trauma caused by cyberbullying.

Suggestions:

Based on the outcome of the literature review, the following suggestions were made:

1. Regular enlightenment campaigns by school counselors should be carried out through posters, debates, and seminars on the dangers of cyberbullying among secondary school students.
2. An anti-cyberbullying week should be included in the Rivers State Academic Calendar across secondary schools alongside the already ongoing anti-bullying week.
3. Classroom teachers should be involved in fighting this menace by referring culprits in their respective classes to school counselors; and a further disciplinary action against the rebellious students.

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