


Incidence of Cyberbullying Behaviour among Students of Tertiary Institutions in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria

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Abstract

This study is carried out to survey the prevalence of cyberbullying behaviour among tertiary institution students in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. To achieve the purpose, two research questions were raised and one null hypothesis was formulated to guide the study. The survey design was adopted for the study. A sample of 530 tertiary institution students was selected from a population of 67,092 through the use of purposive and accidental sampling techniques. It used Cyber-Bullying Assessment Questionnaire (C-BAQ) in data gathering. Descriptive statistic of percentage, mean, standard deviations and bar chart was used to analyze the students' response on cyber bullying behaviour, while population t-test was used to test the null hypothesis. Results indicated that the level of cyber bullying was significantly high. It was recommended, among others, that social welfare agencies should devise means of implementing and consolidating effective cyber frameworks that will protect students from being harassed, and that counselling should be given to students on the need to desist from cyber trolling and trickery.

Keywords: cyber, bullying, harassment, denigration, trolling

Introduction

The behaviour of students at school is a critical factor in their social, emotional and moral development. The consequences of their behaviour at school can be harmful; students' inappropriate behaviour at school can distract both the students and those around them from their learning tasks (Eneyo et al., 2022). It is gradually becoming a normal thing these days, according to Esuabana (2019), "to see tertiary institution students indulging in different degree of crimes ranging from rape, pick-pocketing, phone snatching and cultism. Today, students' violence has reached unprecedented proportion in contemporary

discourse in Nigeria higher institutions” (Pg 98). This may not be unconnected with the prevalence of cyberbullying among students.

Cyber-bullying implies an aggressive, intentional act or behaviour that is carried out by a group or an individual, using electronic forms of contact, repeatedly and over time against a victim who cannot easily defend himself or herself. It is often similar to traditional bullying, although there are some distinctions. Victims of cyber-bullying may not know the identity of their bully, or why the bullying is targeted at them. The harassment can have wide-reaching effects on the victim than traditional bullying. This is because the content used to harass the victim can be spread and shared easily among many people. It is often accessible to many for a long time after the initial incident. The victim is also sometimes exposed to the harassment whenever they use technology (Vella, 2014). This is opposed to traditional harassment where the bully often must be in physical proximity to the target. According to Ngbar (2019), there are a wide variety of cyber-bullying, including cyber-harassment, cyber-denigration, cyber-trolling, flaming, exclusion, outing, trickery, cyber-stalking and cyber-impersonation, to name a few.

The rate of students’ involvement in social media is a cause for concern to all parents, lecturers and educational planners, as they are frequently seen surfing the internet. Cyber-bullying affects people from any age or walks of life including children, teens and adults who all feel very distressed and alone when bullied online. Cyber-bullying can make one feel totally overwhelmed and this can result in a feeling of embarrassment and frustration. An interaction with some tertiary institution students revealed that they have social media account with Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, Whatsapp and Youtube. They also have friends with which they chat or share messages online on a daily basis even when they are in schools. In the process of social media interactions, embarrassing text messages and pictures, which are capable of damaging the reputations of the students and also distracting them from concentrating on school activities and adjusting well to school environment, could be exchanged (Ngbar, 2019). Ayas and Denniz (2014) carried out a study on predicting the exposure levels of Cyber bullying of elementary students with regard to psychological symptoms. The sample of the study consists of 407 students (192 female, 215 male), attending elementary schools in the second period of 2011-2012 academic year in Sakarya, Turkey. The data were collected using Virtual Bully/Victim Questionnaire, and the Brief Symptom Inventory. Results indicated that there is a moderate positive correlation between the level of exposure to virtual bullying and psychoticism.

Another study on the determination of the level of being Cyber Bully/Victim of Eighth Grade Students of Elementary Schools was carried out by Karabacaka et al. (2016). The main aim of the research was to examine the cyber bullying and cyber victim which transforms into a big problem by extending more and more between young generations in 21st century. It was shown that the level of cyber bullying and cyber victim of the eighth grade students has been low. With regards to gender, it was found that the boys have been more cyber bully and have been more cyber victim when compared with the girls. Findings also indicated that the student who face cyber bullying was more inclined to be cyber bully. Ridvan and Muge (2016) studied cyberbullying sensitivity and awareness among entry-level university students. It was observed that with increased usage of the Internet and social media, cyberbullying among young people has recently come to the fore worldwide, and Turkey has been no exception to this. The purpose of this study is to investigate entry level university students' past and present experiences of cyberbullying, specifically within digital social environments. A survey method was adopted, with participation of entry level undergraduate students from various departments of a public university in Turkey during the 2015-2016 academic year. The 'Cyberbullying Sensitivity Scale', was the instrument applied. Findings from the study shed light on the current status of sensitivity and awareness about cyberbullying, with important implications for the introduction and fostering of healthier and more informed use of information and communication technologies.

In a study on cyber-harassment among university students, Vella (2014) observed that cyber-harassment had recently evolved from conventional harassment. The study aimed at investigating cyber-harassment among university students that attends the University of Malta. It aimed specifically at studying whether cyber-harassment among University of Malta students exists and if so, in what forms. The study involved both quantitative and qualitative methods, leading to triangulation of data that includes a sample of 345 university students. Using a correlational research design and multiple regression analysis, the study found out that 1 out of 10 university students were victims of cyber-harassment while attending the University of Malta. Further on, interviews were conducted with various professionals related to the field of cyber-harassment. The researcher continues by examining the definition of cyber-harassment, the various tools used to launch the attacks, the offenders' and victims' characteristics and university students' perception on cyber-harassment acts. The study also discussed the impact of cyber-harassment and the various consequences experienced by victims, the available mechanisms that offer support to the student victims and an outlet to speak out against this form of criminality, the difficulties

encountered by law enforcement to investigate such crime and the extent of awareness of the crime in Malta.

Mairéad et al. (2015) conducted a study on the review of cyberbullying and suggestions for online psychological therapy. Survey research method was used for the study. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze responses. They observed that cyberbullying victimisation has been associated with similar negative consequences to traditional or face-to-face bullying such as lower academic achievement, anxiety, and sometimes even suicide. The selection process consisted of a comprehensive search that was conducted in January 2015 in the following databases: PsychInfo, ERIC, Web of Science and Medline. A total of 19 papers were included. They concluded with suggestions for online psychological treatment for victims and bullies as a means of coping with the distress caused from cyberbullying experiences. Huffington (2013) studied the Offline Nightmares behind Online Trolling. The study used a meta-analytical design. The results showed that when cyber trolling is sustained, it results in teenagers losing confidence. The damaging effects are compounded as more than two thirds of the 2,000 youngsters polled, said they receive the abusive messages from someone they know, making them more personal. Almost half said they kept the attacks secret. Despite this, one in ten of those interviewed admitted to trolling, with a quarter saying they find it funny and almost a third (29%) saying they do it because their friends do so too.

Susanne et al. (2009) observed that cyberspace provides a new venue for peer victimization. Through using cyber technology (like cellular phones, text messages, Facebook, and others), aggressive youth or bullies can victimize others in a rapidly growing social media environment that is difficult to monitor and even more challenging to regulate. In cyberspace, aggressive youth employ a variety of tactics to victimize their peers, including direct harassment, denigration, impersonating others, outing/tricking others, flaming, and trolling. Thus, a victim may not know who an aggressor is or how to report him or her. Additionally, cyber aggressors can victimize their peers publically (for instance, in a chat room, a mass text message) or privately (like through a personal email), which allows them to control how many bystanders witness their bullying behaviour. Pride and Richards (2014) studied the performance statistics for African American students in public schools. Their suspension rates are twice that of European American students, and 20 percent of them are likely to drop out of school before graduation. They repeatedly compared African American children to their European American counterparts and find them lower in achievement, IQ, creativity, reading, writing, and social and cultural skills.

A cumulative frequency and Ogive curve was used to summarise data. The study revealed that deficiency approach to the education of African American students ignores the first tenet of a constructivist philosophy, which is to teach from the knowledge base of the learner. Rather than a fault of the students, it was concluded that the deficiency lies in a system of education that refuses to adapt itself to differences among students' cyber use.

On the perceptions, attitudes and institutional factors that influence academic performance of Visual Arts students in Ghana's senior high school core curriculum subjects, Opoku-Asare and Siaw (2020) observed that senior high school (SHS) students in Ghana are required to pass all core and elective curricula subjects in the West African Senior School Certificate Examination (WASSCE) to qualify for higher education. Unfortunately, many Visual Arts students perform poorly or fail in English, Mathematics, Integrated Science and Social Studies, which constitute the SHS core curriculum subjects. To ascertain the factors that account for low performance of Visual Arts students in the WASSCE core subjects, the study employed interview, questionnaire and observation to gather qualitative and quantitative data from 20 core subject and 15 Visual Arts teachers, 5 heads of schools, 5 Heads of Visual Arts department and 50 Visual Arts students in five Senior High Schools (SHSs) in Ashanti Region. Regression statistics was used to analyze data. The findings revealed that some core subject teachers denigrate Visual Arts students as 'unintelligent', 'not serious' and 'difficult to teach' as compared to their peers in the Science, Business and allied elective SHS programmes; with some refusing responsibility in Visual Arts departments. Perceiving core subjects as 'theoretical' and 'difficult to learn', many Visual Arts students neglect the learning of core subjects and concentrate time and effort on elective Textiles, Ceramics and allied Visual Arts subjects. Invariably, many Visual Arts students make poor WASSCE grades in core subjects and miss participation in higher education. Active monitoring of teaching, attitudinal change and motivation could build the capacity of Visual Arts students to participate fully in the economic development of Ghana.

Deschamps and McNutt (2016) stated that cyber-harassment is a form of bullying or harassment that is perpetrated using electronic forms of contact. It occurs when a person posts or sends offensive, insulting, and mean messages repeatedly. It involves the bully sending offensive and malicious messages to an individual or a group and is often repeated multiple times. Cyber-harassment is a form that involves continual threatening and rude messages, and can lead to physical harassment in the real, offline world. Harassment is a sustained, constant and intentional form of bullying comprising abusive or threatening messages sent to a child or group. It also involves repeatedly sending malicious messages

to someone online. This may affect the social interaction of the target by making him or her depressed and lost focus and concentration especially within the school environment. A study was carried out by Graeme (2014) on school pupils trolling teachers with 'vile' abuse on Facebook and Twitter. The study shows that teachers are facing "vile" abuse from children as young as seven on social networking websites such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and Instagram. The study used Social Media Questionnaire (SMQ) to collect data. A descriptive analysis of the responses revealed that more than a fifth of teachers have been the victim of "cyber trolling" from pupils and even their parents in the last year. The study showed social media was being used to make offensive remarks about teachers' personal appearance, classroom performance and sexuality, with websites also used to circulate malicious claims about alleged inappropriate behaviour and drunkenness. In one case, pupils set up a bogus Facebook account in a teacher's name, saying: "I will rape every Year 8 pupil who comes to the school." Other pupils found a picture of an unconscious drunk who resembled a particular teacher – then posted it on Twitter and distributed it to other children.

On the effects of cyber impersonation on psycho-social wellbeing of children, Gahh (2021) observed that cyber impersonation affects people from any age, including children, teens and adults who all feel very distressed and alone when being bullied online. Cyber impersonation can make one feel totally overwhelmed which can result in many feeling embarrassed that they are going through such a devastating time, and not knowing what support is available to them. Many children feel unable to confide in an adult because they feel ashamed and wonder whether they will be judged, told to ignore it or close their account which they might not want to do. Data analysis shows that 20% of children and young people indicate fear of cyber bullies made them reluctant to go to school, 5% reported self-harm, 3% reported an attempt of suicide as a direct result of cyber impersonation. Young people are found to be twice as likely to be bullied on Facebook as any other social networking site, 28% of young people have reported incidents of cyber impersonation on Twitter and 26% of young people have reported incidents of cyber impersonation on Ask.fm. It was concluded that cyber impersonation leads to low self-esteem, withdrawal from family and spending a lot of time alone, reluctance to let parents or other family members anywhere near their mobile phones or laptops, finding excuses to stay away from school or work including school refusal, friends disappearing or being excluded from social events, losing weight or changing appearance to try and fit in, fresh marks on the skin that could indicate self-harm and dressing differently such as wearing long sleeved clothes in the summer to hide any marks and a change in personality (like

anger, depression, crying, withdrawn). It was recommended that youths should be educated that no one deserves to be treated in this way and that they have done nothing wrong, students should ensure that they know that there is help available to them, encourage them to talk to a teacher that they trust so they feel they have somewhere safe at school to go to, teachers should encourage them to talk to their parents/care givers and if it is not possible to write a letter or speak to another family member, students take screen shots of the cyber bullying so that they have proof this is happening, students should report all abuse to the relevant social media networks by clicking on the “report abuse” button, people should keep a diary so they have somewhere safe and private to write down their innermost thoughts and feelings which will help to avoid feelings bottling up, teachers should give praise for being so brave and talking things through which will hopefully empower them to take responsibility and get help, people should know that sending abuse by email or posting it into a web board can be harassment and if this has happened make a complaint to the police who can trace IP addresses, parents should ask the school if they have a School Liaison Police Officer that can help in this situation and talk to the school about the dangers and effects.

On cyber-trolling, Duggan (2014) maintained that it is the deliberate act of provoking a response through the use of insults or bad language on online forums and social networking sites. The troll will personally attack someone or anyone closely related to the target in order to provoke a response. Their main aim is to make them angry enough to act in the same way. Trolls spend their time looking for vulnerable people to put down. Usually, they are looking to make themselves feel good by making others feel bad. The “trolls,” as they are called, just wait for a response, and voluntarily post outrageous comments in order to generate and trigger off a conflict and a reaction from the person or the community targeted. A troll is someone who posts inflammatory, incendiary messages, usually void of any substance, in an online community, such as an online discussion forum, chat room, or blog, with the sole intent of provoking other users into an emotional response. Internet trolls intentionally try to provoke or offend others in order to elicit a reaction. This is a common phenomenon among secondary school students nowadays as they are often seen busy with the phone almost everywhere they go, sending and receiving messages. The worst part of it is that even if the accusation is unfounded, being branded a troll is quite damaging to one's online reputation and this may influence the way they interact with one another both in and outside school.

Cyber-bullies may disclose victims' personal data (real name, home address, or workplace/schools) at websites or forums or may use impersonation, creating fake

accounts, comments or sites, posing as their target for the purpose of publishing material in their name that defames, discredits or ridicules them. This can leave the cyber-bully anonymous which can make it difficult for the offender to be caught or punished for their behaviour, although not all cyber-bullies maintain their anonymity. Text or instant messages and emails between friends can also constitute cyber-bullying if what is said or displayed is hurtful to the participants. Also, cyber-impersonation is the creation of fake accounts to exploit another teen's trust. They may also hack into an account and post or send messages that are damaging to the person's reputation or relationships. Cyber-impersonators pretend to be someone else when sending or posting mean or false messages online. They post false or hurtful messages on online bulletin boards or in chat rooms (Al-Badi et al., 2013).

Cyber-denigration is putting mean online messages through email, instant messaging, chat rooms, or websites set up to make fun of someone. Denigration involves a negative description of something the child achieves or expresses interest in. It entails engaging someone in instant messaging, tricking them into revealing personal information and then forwarding that information to others. This embarrassing and insulting message received by victim of cyber-bullying could cause great fear and pains anytime he reflects on it and this may affect social adjustment among secondary school students. Cyberstalking is a technologically-based "attack" on one person who has been targeted specifically for that attack for reasons of anger, revenge or control. Cyberstalking can take many forms, including embarrassment and humiliation of the victim. Egwu et al. (2011) in their study concluded that victims of cyber stalking may be faced with lifelong social, physical and psychological problems, students may withdraw from social activities and avoid school or drop out if it persists. Again, cyber trickery is the act of deceiving someone into giving out personal information or publishing it. According to Finn (2004), the bullies trick an individual and extract sensitive and private messages that can be both embarrassing and stigmatizing for individuals.

Mooney (2021) in an article ‘Internet Trolls Really Are Horrible People: Narcissistic, Machiavellian, psychopathic and sadistic’, identified trolls in a variety of ways. One was by simply asking survey participants what they “enjoyed doing most” when on online comment sites, offering five options: “debating issues that are important to you,” “chatting with others,” “making new friends,” “trolling others,” and “other.” Here’s how different responses about these Internet commenting preferences matched up with responses to questions designed to identify Dark Tetrad traits - Machiavellianism (willingness to manipulate and deceive others), narcissism (egotism and self-obsession), psychopathy (the lack of remorse and empathy), and sadism (pleasure in the suffering of others). To be sure, only 5.6 percent of survey respondents actually specified that they enjoyed “trolling.” By contrast, 41.3 percent of Internet users were “non-commenters,” meaning they did not like engaging online at all. So, trolls are, as has often been suspected, a minority of online commenters, and an even smaller minority of overall Internet users. The study found correlations, sometimes quite significant, between these traits and trolling behaviour. It also found a relationship between all Dark Tetrad traits (except for narcissism) and the overall time that an individual spent, per day, commenting on the Internet.

Research questions

The following research questions were formulated for this study:

- 1) What is the prevalence of cyber bullying behaviour among tertiary institution students in Akwa Ibom State?

Hypothesis

Ho1: The level of cyber bullying behaviour among tertiary institution students in Akwa Ibom State is not significantly high.

Methodology

The research design adopted was the survey design. Survey design is a design where the researcher describes the status of affairs as they exist (Joshua, 2008). This is a method of collecting information by means of interviews and administering questionnaires. The rationale for using this design is that it allows in-depth study of the subject matter and it is suitable to describe attitudes, views or opinions and behaviour patterns of people. Therefore, the researchers described affairs as they were factual. This design is chosen on the premise that the manifestations of the variable under study had already taken place before the researchers embarked on the study. This type of design is possible when human subjects are used in real situations and the researcher comes in after the effects.

The population of this study comprised all public tertiary institution students in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. They include the University of Uyo with a population of 26,887, Federal University of Science and Technology with population of 722, Federal Polytechnic, Ukana with 3,902 students' population, Akwa Ibom State University with a students' population of 11,117, Akwa Ibom State Polytechnic with 14,401 as the students' population, Akwa Ibom State College of Education with 10,063; all totalling 67,092. The sample for the study comprised 530 tertiary institution students in Akwa Ibom state, Nigeria selected through the use of stratified and accidental non-probability strategies. The stratified sampling technique is appropriate when the nature or characteristics of the population consist of a number of distinct sub-groups that need to be represented in the sample. The reason for the stratification is to ensure that a more representative sample is drawn for the study, reflecting attributes such as sex, age and academic discipline. In selecting the respondents, the accidental sampling technique was used. In this method, it was only the students that the researchers find convenient that was sampled for the study. This included those who are accessible and were willing to respond to the instrument.

The instrument that was used in this study was the "Cyber-Bullying Assessment Questionnaire (C-BAQ)" designed by the researchers. The reliability of the instrument was obtained through trial testing. To this end, the instrument was administered on students with the same characteristics who were not part of the main study. In trial testing of the instrument, a total of thirty (30) students from one of the non-participating schools within the research area were used. The data collected were coded and Cronbach Alpha reliability was used to determine the reliability. The results of the test analysis ranged from 0.71 to 0.83 which are considered significantly reliable.

The questionnaire is a four-point Likert scale type of Very Frequently (VF), Frequently (F), Sometimes (S) and Rarely (R). Part 1 was designed to provide the bio-data of the respondents, such as age, sex and academic discipline, name of school and year/level. Part 2 was designed to measure the variables under study. This part was further divided into 6 sub-components whereas the major component was cyber bullying. The sub-components are: Harassment, denigration, trolling, impersonation, stalking and trickery. The items were generated based on the six adopted clusters of C-BAQ; consequently the items that were drafted brought the number to a total of 36. A 4-point Likert scale was used in response pattern of Strongly Agree (SA) = 4, Agree (A) = 3, Disagree (D) = 2 and Strongly Disagree (SD) = 1.

Descriptive statistic of percentage, mean and standard deviation were used to analyze the students' response on cyber bullying behaviour, while population t-test was used to test the null hypothesis.

Presentation of results

The results of the data collected are presented according to the research question stated:

Research question 1: What is the prevalence of cyber bullying behaviour among tertiary institution students in Akwa Ibom State?

Table 1: Prevalence of cyber bullying behaviour among tertiary institution students in Akwa Ibom State n =530

S/N	Online usually cause	Chats	VF	F	S	R	Total
1.	Harassments		112 (23%)	222(41%)	98(18%)	98(18%)	530(100%)
2.	Denigration		285 (54%)	82 (15%)	85 (16%)	78(15%)	530(100%)
3.	Trolling		301 (57%)	99 (19%)	98 (18%)	32 (6%)	530(100%)
4.	Impersonation		189 (36%)	201(38%)	103(19%)	37 (7%)	530(100%)
5.	Stalking		302 (57%)	59 (11%)	111(21%)	58 (11%)	530(100%)
6.	Trickery		132 (25%)	211(40%)	107(20%)	80 (15%)	530(100%)

Table 1 presents the prevalence of cyber bullying among tertiary institution students in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. From a total of 530 respondents, 112 students representing 23% have experienced Cyber-Harassment Very Frequently (VF), 222 (41%) have experienced it Frequently (F), 98 (18%) have experienced it Sometimes (S) and 98 (18%) have experienced it Rarely (R). On Cyber-Denigration, 285 students (54%) have been denigrated Very Frequently (VF), 82(15%) have been denigrated Frequently (F), 85(16%) have been denigrated Sometimes (S), whereas 78(15%) have Rarely (R) experienced Cyber-Denigration. On Cyber- Trolling, 301 tertiary institution students representing 57% affirmed that they have been cyber-trolled Very Frequently (VF), 99(19%) of the students affirmed it Frequently (F), 98 (18%) affirmed it Sometimes (S), while 32(6%) affirmed

that it occurred Rarely (R). On Cyber-Impersonation, 189(36%) of the respondents agreed that it occurs Very Frequently (VF), 201(38%) agreed it occurs Frequently (F), 103 (19%) agreed it occurs Sometimes (S) and 37 (7%) agreed it Rarely (R) occurs. On Cyber-Stalking, 302(57%) of the students confirmed being stalked Very Frequently (VF), 59 (11%) of the students confirmed it Frequently (F), 111(21%) confirmed it Sometimes (S) and 58 (11%) of the students confirmed it Rarely (R) occurs. On Cyber-Trickery, 132(25%) of the students have been tricked Very Frequently (VF), 211(40%) of the students have been tricked Frequently (F), 107(20%) of the students have been tricked Sometimes (S), while 80 (15%) of the students have been tricked Rarely (R).

Ho1: The level of cyber bullying behaviour among tertiary institution students in Akwa Ibom State is not significantly high.

There is only one variable in this hypothesis, which is cyber bullying in terms of harassment, denigration, trolling, impersonation, stalking and trickery. One sample t-test was therefore used for the analysis. The reference mean score was obtained by multiplying the average of the scores assigned to the four response categories for each of the items on the questionnaire by the number of items used to measure cyber bullying in terms of harassment, denigration, trolling and impersonation (which was 6). Thus, the reference mean score = $(4+3+2+1)/4 \times 6 = 15.00$.

The results of analysis presented in table 2 have shown the mean and standard deviations of the independent variable, cyber bullying, in terms of harassment, denigration, trolling, impersonation, stalking trickery. The comparison of each of these sample mean scores with the reference mean score of 15.00 for harassment, denigration, trolling, impersonation, stalking and trickery respectively yielded t-values for cyber harassment (7.214), cyber denigration (29.909), cyber trolling (19.497), cyber impersonation (3.391), cyber stalking (8.211) and cyber trickery (7.928). The calculated t-values are higher than the critical t-value of 1.96 at .05 level of significance with 528 degrees of freedom. With these results, the null hypothesis is rejected. This implies that cyber bullying behaviour among students in tertiary institutions in Akwa Ibom State is significantly high.

Table 2: Population t-test analysis of cyber bullying in terms of harassment, denigration, trolling and impersonation is significantly high

Cyber bullying	\bar{x}	μ	SD	t_{cal}	p-level
Harassment	16.83	15.00	6.09	7.214	.000
Denigration	19.32	15.00	7.44	29.909	.000
Trolling	17.91	15.00	3.57	19.497	.000
Impersonation	15.46	15.00	3.24	3.391	.001
Stalking	18.45	15.00	2.93	8.211	.000
Trickery	17.21	15.00	4.02	7.982	.000

* $p < .05$, Critical $t = 1.96$, $df = 528$.

Discussion of findings

The result of the population t-test analysis of the level of cyber bullying indicated that the level of cyber bullying is significantly high. This is in accordance with the study of Ayas and Deniz (2014) who studied the prediction of the exposure levels of cyber bullying of elementary students with regard to psychological symptoms. They observed that cyber bullying, using the internet and other digital technologies to harm others can be seen as conscious and deliberate activity. The findings of Ridvan and Muge (2016), also agreed with that of the present study. They observed that the numbers of young people subjected to bullying on digital platforms increases daily and has a significant impact on their lives. It is therefore vital to raise awareness about cyberbullying, both in terms of taking precautions against its threats and to foster behavioural changes that may lead to reduced exposure to cyberbullying.

In contrast, the study of Karabacaka et al. (2016) on the determination of the level of being cyber bully/victim of eighth grade students of elementary schools, deviated from the findings of the present study. It was determined that the level of cyber bullying and cyber victim of the eighth grade students was low. The reason for the difference in the findings could be as a result of differences in the research design and statistical tool. Regression analysis was used in their study while the present study employed population t-test in its analysis.

The result of the statistical analysis also revealed that cyber-harassment is significantly high. Mairéad et al. (2015) who carried out a study on the review of cyber-bullying and suggestions for online psychological therapy supported the present study. They noted that cyber-bullying victimization has been associated with similar negative consequences to

traditional or face-to-face bullying such as lower academic achievement, anxiety, and sometimes even suicide. Similarly, the study of Susanne et al. (2009) observed that cyberspace provides a new venue for peer victimization. Through using cyber technology like cellular phones, text messages, and Facebook, aggressive youth or bullies can victimize others in a rapidly growing social media environment that is difficult to monitor and even more challenging to regulate.

From the finding of the data analysis of the hypothesis testing with cyber-denigration among students, it was discovered that cyber-denigration is statistically significantly high. The analysis showed that the null hypothesis was rejected. The result is in agreement with Pride and Richards (2014) who studied the performance statistics for African American students in public schools regarding Television News Coverage of the Student Movement. It was discovered that suspension rates of African-American students were twice that of European American students, and 20 percent of them were likely to drop out of school before graduation due to cyber-denigration. Similarly, the study of *Opoku-Asare and Siaw (2020)* on the Perceptions, Attitudes and Institutional Factors that Influence Academic Performance of Visual Arts Students in Ghana's Senior High School Core Curriculum Subjects, found that some core subject teachers denigrate Visual Arts students as 'unintelligent', 'not serious' and 'difficult to teach' as compared to their peers in the Science, Business and allied elective SHS programmes; with some refusing responsibility in Visual Arts departments.

The hypothesis testing revealed that cyber trolling is significantly high in the study area. The finding is in conformity with the study of Huffington (2013) who studied the Offline Nightmares behind Online Trolling. The results showed that this kind of bullying, when sustained, results in teenagers losing confidence. The damaging effects are compounded as more than two thirds of the 2,000 youngsters polled, said they receive the abusive messages from someone they know, making them more personal. Almost half said they kept the attacks secret. Despite this, one in ten of those interviewed by youth charity admitted to trolling, with a quarter saying they find it funny and almost a third (29%) saying they do it because their friends do so too. A similar study was carried out by Graeme (2014) on school pupils trolling teachers with 'vile' abuse on Facebook and Twitter. The study showed that teachers are facing "vile" abuse from children as young as seven on social networking websites such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and Instagram. It reveals that more than a fifth of teachers have been the victim of "cyber trolling" from pupils and even their parents in the last year. The study showed social media was being used to make

offensive remarks about teachers' personal appearance, classroom performance and sexuality, with websites also used to circulate malicious claims about alleged inappropriate behaviour and drunkenness.

The result of data analysis revealed that cyber impersonation is also significantly high. The finding of this study is in consonance with the finding of Gahh (2021) who studied the effects of cyber impersonation on psycho-social wellbeing of children. The study found that 20% of children and young people indicate that fear of cyber impersonators made them reluctant to go to school, 5% reported self-harm, 3% reported an attempt of suicide as a direct result of cyber impersonation. Young people are found to be twice as likely to be bullied on facebook as any other social networking site, 28% of young people have reported incidents of cyber impersonation on Twitter and 26% of young people have reported incidence of cyber impersonation on Ask.fm. It was concluded that cyber impersonation leads to low self-esteem, withdrawal from family and spending a lot of time alone, reluctance to let parents or other family members anywhere near their mobiles and laptops. By implication, students who experience cyber impersonation are likely to be skipping school, having declining academic performance and depression.

Conclusion

It is clearly evident that tertiary institution students in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria have been experiencing various forms of cyber-bullying both in school and outside school. It is glaring from the findings of the data analysed that cyber bullying in form of harassment, denigration, trolling, impersonation, stalking and trickery is significantly high in the study area.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following are recommended:

1. Social welfare agencies should device means of implementing and consolidating effective cyber frameworks that will protect students from being harassed.
2. Counselling should be given to students on the need to desist from cyber trolling and trickery.
3. School administrators should create and monitor social media blogs of students in order to track cyber denigration among students.
4. The government should set up a panel to checkmate cyber impersonation, stalking and abuse among young people.
5. Research should be carried out to unearth the degree of negative effect of cyber-bullying among tertiary institution students.

Incidence of Cyberbullying Behaviour among Students of Tertiary Institutions in Akwa Ibom State,
Nigeria

Udeme Bright Sunday & Glory Ngon Neji

6. Educational evaluators should design online Learning Management Devices (LMD) that will preoccupy students with course content activities thereby reducing the time for leisure and bullying.

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