



INFLUENCE OF CYBERBULLYING ON SUICIDAL BEHAVIOURS AMONG SENIOR SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS UDI EDUCATION ZONE, ENUGU STATE

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the influence of cyberbullying on suicidal behaviours among senior secondary school students in Udi Education Zone, Enugu State. The study was guided by two research questions. It employed a descriptive survey research design. The population of the study comprised of 78,704 senior secondary school students in Udi Education Zone, Enugu State. The sample size was 74 senior secondary students. The study adopted a multi-stage sampling procedure. The researchers deployed a structured instrument titled “Influence of Cyberbullying on Suicidal Behaviours among Senior Secondary School Students Questionnaire” for data collection. The instrument was structured into a 4-point likert-type scale with the response options of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D), and Strongly Disagree (SA), having the numerical values of 4, 3, 2, and 1, respectively. The instrument was validated by three experts; one from Measurement and Evaluation Unit in the Department of Science Education, and two others from the Department of Social Science Education, all in the University of Nigeria, Nsukka. Using the Cronbach Alpha method, the overall reliability coefficients of 0.72 was obtained, indicating that the instrument was reliable and suitable for the study. The data was collected using an online survey called Google Form. Data collected were analyzed using descriptive statistics of mean and standard deviation. Findings of the study showed that suicidal behaviours are highly influenced by cyberbullying among secondary school students in Udi Education Zone, Enugu State, among others. Based on the findings of the study, it was recommended that secondary schools should intensify cyberbullying awareness and prevention through periodic seminars, workshops, and school-wide campaigns, among others.

Keywords: Cyberbullying, Suicidal Behaviours, senior secondary school

Introduction

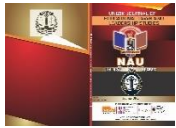
As internet access and smartphone use are increasingly on the rise among adolescents in Nigeria, so also is exposure to negative online interactions such as cyberbullying. Indeed, continued exposure to negative interactions, either in face-to-face conversions or over the internet space, tend to alter people's thought processes negatively. Cyberbullying is a critical psychosocial risk factor that may significantly influence suicidal behaviours among secondary school students, particularly with the widespread use of digital communication technologies. Thus, the increasing penetration of digital technologies and social media has transformed social interaction among adolescents, creating both opportunities and risks. Empirical evidence consistently demonstrates



a strong association between cyberbullying victimization and suicidal behaviours among adolescents (John et al, 2018; Ugwoke et al, 2024).

Cyberbullying is a clear demonstration of character assassination, portrayed through libels and slanders over the internet space, usually on social media platforms. Cyberbullying refers to deliberate and repeated harm inflicted through electronic means such as social networking sites, text messages, and online forums (Hinduja & Patchin, 2018). Cyberbullying is a considerable public health problem (Armitage, 2021). Unlike traditional bullying, cyberbullying can occur at any time and reach a wide audience, thereby intensifying its psychological impacts on victims. A systematic review and meta-analysis on the consequences of bullying victimization in childhood and adolescence reported strong causal associations between victimization and mental health problems such as depression, anxiety, poor general health, and suicidal ideation and behaviors (Moore et al., 2017). A recent study using the World School Health Survey database concluded that their analyses showed that suicidal ideation, suicide planning, suicide attempt, and cyberbullying were common and interrelated phenomena in school adolescents worldwide (Tang et al., 2020). According to their results, females had a higher prevalence of ideation and planning, when compared to males, but a similar prevalence of suicide attempt and bullying. However, the association between bullying and suicidal intent was stronger in men. There is strong and consistent evidence demonstrating the close relationship between cyberbullying and suicidal behaviours like ideation, planning or attempt (Van-Geel et al., 2014). Those who have been victims are more likely to attempt or die by suicide than those who have never experienced bullying, particularly cyberbullying (Hinduja and Patchin, 2018). Controlling for age, gender, course, history of maltreatment, psychiatric diagnoses, and type of bullying, Alavi et al. (2017) found that children and adolescents who were victims of any type of bullying were 19 times more likely to have suicidal ideation than those with no history of bullying. Cyberbullying has been found to pose more impact on ideation than physical bullying (Geel et al., 2014).

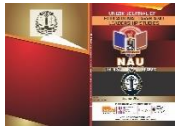
It has been suggested that the effect of cyberbullying was greater because the internet facilitated access to a much larger audience and content could remain online longer, such that bullying had more exposure and longer duration (Hinduja & Patchin, 2018). Through a longitudinal study that followed 2120 individuals for 17 years, Perret et al. (2020) concluded that adolescents who experienced cyberbullying were significantly more likely to exhibit severe suicidal ideation and attempts. Online bullying is also an alarming phenomenon throughout the world with a high global prevalence rate. Mallik (2020) also reported that the prevalence of online bullying in Bangladesh reached 31.9%, indicating a significant level of cyberbullying in the country. A meta-analysis of 46 studies in Australia documented that 1 in 7 teenagers had been a victim of bullying in the last 12 months. Recent research estimates that approximately 29% of Australian youth aged 13 to 17 years are victims of cyberbullying. The negative effects of cyberbullying affect various aspects of the victim's life, posing serious challenges in maintaining mental and emotional balance. Secondary school students who are victims of cyberbullying have a higher risk of experiencing various adverse psychosocial consequences (Eyuboglu et al., 2021). Findings have also shown that cyberbullying can disrupt mental and emotional balance and disrupt various aspects of students' daily lives (Carvalho et al., 2021).



This risk remained irrespective of prior mental health symptoms, family challenges, or previous traditional bullying experiences. In a recent systematic review of cyberbullying in Canada, Farrington et al. (2023) found that girls had a higher likelihood than boys of being cyber victims, though both genders had equal chances of being cyber perpetrators. Furthermore, they highlighted that, cyber victims were at risk of engaging in suicidal behavior, including ideation, planning, and attempts. According to the 2019 Youth Risk Behavior Survey conducted by the U.S. Center for Disease Control and Prevention, suicide was the second leading cause of death for young people between 14 and 18 years old in school life (Ivey-Stephenson et al., 2020). This survey also revealed that 18.8 % of students, during the 12 months prior to the study, reported having seriously thought about attempting suicide. This thought was almost twice as frequent in females (24.1%) than in males (13.3%). Women (19.9 %) were also more likely than men (11.3 %) to have devised a plan for how they would commit suicide. Epidemiological data provided by the National Institute of Health of Colombia (2021) indicated that 73 people, per day, attempted suicide. One out of every three cases, was a child or adolescent between 5 and 17 years of age. Problems in the school environment were the second most relevant trigger for suicide attempts between 5 and 14 years of age. This same factor was the third most relevant in adolescents aged 15 to 18 years. Several studies have equally found that secondary school students who are victims of cyberbullying tend to face various psychological problems, including suicidal thoughts and behaviours (Nixon, 2014; Nikolaou, 2017).

Suicidal behaviours are any attempts, plans or ideations to commit suicide. Suicidal behaviour is defined broadly to include suicidal ideation, planning, attempts, completed suicide. Put differently, suicidal behaviours have been seen as actions and thoughts oriented toward ending one's life rather than as a single event or isolated symptoms (Yoyen & Keles, 2024). Research shows that suicidal behaviours must be understood multiple risk and protective factors than span individual, interpersonal, and ecological systems, highlighting psychological distress, social isolation, and environmental stressors as correlates (Richardson et al, 2024). Adolescents' suicidal ideation in particular, has been modelled within psychological needs frameworks, indicating that unmet basic needs and anxious-depressive symptoms increase vulnerability to suicidal thoughts and behaviours (Lim et al, 2022).

The socio-ecological perspective emphasizes that adolescents' suicidal behaviour arises from interactions between personal traits and broader social contexts, requiring integrative models for prevention. Systematic research during the COVID-19 pandemic found that global risk factors—such as psychological symptoms, economic instability, and lack of social support, intensified suicidal behaviour, underscoring its multifaceted dimensions (Mudiyanselage et al, 2024). Empirical evidence also highlights gender-specific pathways and motivational factors related to suicidal behaviour among adolescents, pointing to the need for targeted conceptual models (European Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, 2025). In all reported cases, depression was the most frequent psychological disorder as a risk factor associated with cyberbullying. Depression is a risk factor for adolescent suicide, especially in females (Bilsen, 2018). This type of mood disturbance has consistently emerged in studies that have analyzed risk factors for suicide in children and adolescents (Carballo et al., 2020). It has been noted that ideation and planning are more frequent among females, whereas suicide attempt is more frequent in males (Kim & Kim, 2010). Although gender differences on this issue are inconclusive, there is a trend toward



considering being female and having experienced depressive symptomatology as risk factors or predictors of suicidal ideation (Im et al., 2017).

In Enugu State, particularly in Udi Education Zone, the proliferation of digital communication technologies and social media platforms has transformed the behavioural disposition of adolescent interaction, creating unprecedented opportunities for connection alongside novel forms of harassment. Among these, cyberbullying defined as intentional, repeated harm inflicted through electronic means such as social media, messaging applications, and online forums has become a pervasive psychosocial stressor for young people worldwide. Although traditional forms of bullying have long been associated with negative psychological outcomes, cyberbullying poses unique risks by enabling anonymity, amplifying audience exposure, and extending the reach of harmful content beyond school premises and hours. Empirical research conducted in diverse cultural contexts indicates a robust association between cyberbullying victimization and adverse mental health outcomes, including depression, anxiety, social withdrawal, and most critically, suicidal behaviours, comprising suicidal ideation, planning, and attempts (Richard et al, 2024; Yoyen & Keles, 2024). Suicidal behaviour during adolescence is a major public health concern, given its established role as a leading cause of death in this age group and its long-term psychological consequences for survivors. Within the Nigerian context, unchecked internet access among adolescents has paralleled rising reports of distress and self-harm behaviours. However, the extent to which cyberbullying contributes to these outcomes remains inadequately understood, particularly in Udi Education Zone in Enugu State.

In Enugu State, secondary school students are increasingly connected online for both academic and social purposes, yet there is a paucity of empirical data examining how exposure to cyberbullying relates to suicidal behaviours in this population. While studies on adolescents' suicide and self-harm have highlighted various psychosocial risk factors such as peer conflict, depressive symptoms, and socio-economic stressors, few investigations have explicitly examined the specific role of cyberbullying, leaving a critical gap in knowledge. This gap is consequential because the pervasive nature of cyberbullying coupled with inadequate digital literacy programmes, limited mental health resources in schools, and cultural stigma surrounding discussions about suicide, may exacerbate vulnerability among adolescents without detection or support.

Thus, the central problem addressed by this study is the limited understanding of how cyberbullying affects suicidal behaviours among secondary school students in Udi Education Zone in Enugu State, irrespective of the copious international evidence of its impacts and the increasing exposure of adolescents to online environments. Investigating this relationship is essential for informing school-based policies, intervention programmes, and community awareness initiatives that can mitigate the risk of suicide and promote safer digital engagement among students.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What are the forms of cyberbullying prevalent among secondary school students in Udi Education Zone, Enugu State?



2. What are the suicidal behaviours demonstrated by secondary school students as a result of cyberbullying in Udi Education Zone, Enugu State?

Method

The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. The study was conducted in Enugu State. The population of the study comprised of 78,704 secondary school students in Udi Education Zone, Enugu State. The sample size was 74 senior secondary school (SS III) students in Udi Education Zone. The study adopted a multi-stage sampling procedure. The researchers deployed a structured instrument titled “Influence of Cyberbullying on Suicidal Behaviours Questionnaire” for data collection. A 4-point rating scale of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D), and Strongly Disagree (SD) with values of 4, 3, 2, and 1 was applied in the instrument. The instrument was validated by three experts; one from Measurement and Evaluation Unit in the Department of Science Education, and two others from the Department of Social Science Education, all in the University of Nigeria, Nsukka. In attempts to ascertain the reliability of the instrument, 10 copies were administered on SSS III students in Nsukka Education Zone, Enugu State, which is outside the study area. Using the Cronbach Alpha method, the overall reliability coefficients of 0.72 was obtained, indicating that the instrument was reliable and suitable for the study. The data were collected through the service of a research assistant who administered the instrument on the respondents in line with the directives of the researcher. The data collected were analyzed using descriptive statistics of mean and standard deviation to answer the research questions.

Presentation of Results

Research Question One: What are the forms of cyberbullying prevalent among secondary school students in Udi Education Zone, Enugu State?

Table 1: Mean and standard deviation of responses on the forms of cyberbullying prevalent among secondary school students in Udi Education Zone, Enugu State

S/N	Item Statements	Mean	SD	Decision
1.	Deliberate online provocation for amusement-troll	3.23	0.71	Accept
2	Publication of someone's private information online-doxxing	3.05	0.52	Accept
3	Blackmailing someone online for gain using sexual images or messages-sexortion	3.05	0.79	Accept
4	Creating fake identities to emotionally harm others-cat-fishing for harm	2.85	0.49	Accept
5	Persistent monitoring of someone's affairs in online platforms-cyber-stalking	2.79	0.55	Accept
6	Online fights involving the use of vulgar language-flaming	2.69	0.70	Accept
7	Spreading false information about someone with the intention of denting their image-denigration	2.27	1.21	Reject
8	Deliberate removal of someone from online group platforms-exclusion	2.99	0.56	Accept
9	Unauthorized access to someone's online account-hacking	2.78	0.69	Accept
10	Co-ordinated attacks by multiple users against a single target-cyber mobbing	2.01	0.99	Reject
11	Manipulating someone into doubting their intelligence or experience-gas lighting	2.88	0.72	Accept
12	Presenting your offences as someone else's-projecting	2.96	0.63	Accept
Grand Mean		2.79	0.65	Accept

N (74) = Number of Respondents, SD = Standard Deviation



Table 1 shows the mean ratings of respondents on the forms of cyberbullying prevalent among secondary school students in Udi Education Zone, Enugu State. Results from the table further indicate that various forms of cyberbullying are prevalent among secondary school students in Udi Education Zone, Enugu State., with the overall mean rating of 2.79 and the overall standard deviation of 0.65, respectively.

Research Question Two: What are the suicidal behaviours demonstrated by secondary school students as a result of cyberbullying in Udi Education Zone, Enugu State?

Table 2: Mean and standard deviation of responses on the suicidal behaviours demonstrated by secondary school students as a result of cyberbullying in Udi Education Zone, Enugu State

S/N	Item Statements	Mean	SD	Decision
13	Suicidal ideation	2.69	0.95	Accept
14	Passive death wish	2.60	0.72	Accept
15	Verbal expression of hopelessness	2.78	0.68	Accept
16	Written suicidal notes	2.07	1.06	Reject
17	Withdrawal from social interactions	2.89	0.89	Accept
18	Loss of interest in previously enjoyed activities	3.04	0.67	Accept
19	Sudden decline in academic performance	2.54	0.74	Accept
20	Arbitrary giveaway of personal belongings	2.73	0.82	Accept
21	Self-harm behaviours	2.08	1.06	Reject
22	Avoidance of digital platforms	2.98	0.80	Accept
23	Frequent emotional outbursts	2.95	0.61	Accept
24	Training on SPSS-based analysis	3.06	0.71	Accept
Grand Mean		2.70	0.81	Accept

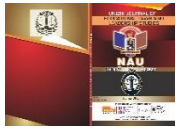
N (74) = Number of Respondents, SD = Standard Deviation

Table 2 shows the mean ratings of respondents on the suicidal behaviours demonstrated by secondary school students as a result of cyberbullying in Udi Education Zone, Enugu State. Results from the table further indicate that suicidal behaviours are highly influenced by cyberbullying among secondary school students in Udi Education Zone, with the overall mean rating of 2.70 and the overall standard deviation of 0.81, respectively.

Discussion

The findings of the study show that various forms of cyberbullying are prevalent among secondary school students in Udi Education Zone, Enugu State. Some of these forms of cyberbullying included trolling, denigration, account hacking, sextortion, cyber mobbing, projecting, doxxing characterized by unauthorized publication of someone's private information online, among others. It can be deduced from the findings of the present study that it exists various forms of cyberbullying among secondary school students in Udi Education Zone of Enugu State. This reality calls for moderating interventions from school stakeholders like teachers and parents in order to forestall the emergence of catastrophic ends amongst students who make use of various social media platforms for different purposes.

In line with the above findings, it has been reported that strong causal associations exist between victimization and mental health problems such as depression, anxiety, poor general health, and suicidal ideation and behaviors (Moore et al., 2017). A recent study using the World School Health Survey database showed that suicidal ideation, suicide planning, suicide attempt, and



cyberbullying were common and interrelated phenomena in school adolescents worldwide (Tang et al., 2020). Several studies have also found that secondary school students who are victims of cyberbullying tend to face various psychological problems, including suicidal thoughts and behaviours (Nixon, 2014; Nikolaou, 2017). Findings have also shown that cyberbullying can disrupt mental and emotional balance and disrupt various aspects of students' daily lives (Carvalho et al., 2021).

Similarly, the study found that suicidal behaviours are highly influenced by cyberbullying among secondary school students in Udi Education Zone. Therefore, it can be deduced from the findings of the present study that secondary school students exposed to cyberbullying are most likely to demonstrate some suicidal behaviours. Some of these suicidal behaviours were identified to include ideation which is the creation of mental picture of suicidal attempts by the victims. Another suicidal behaviour is suicidal planning, covering preparatory measures towards the execution of suicide. All these suicidal behaviours are believed to be worsened when students are trolled, gas lighted, denigrated, cyber stalked or cyber mobbed in any social media platforms they found themselves. In support of the above findings, Perret et al. (2020) found that adolescents who experienced cyberbullying were significantly more likely to exhibit severe suicidal ideation and attempts. Mallik (2020) also reported that the prevalence of online bullying in Bangladesh reached 31.9%, indicates a fairly significant level of suicidal behaviours in the country. Recent research estimates that approximately 29% of Australian youth aged 13 to 17 years are victims of cyberbullying. The negative effects of cyberbullying affect various aspects of the victim's life, posing serious challenges in maintaining mental and emotional balance. Secondary school students who are victims of cyberbullying have a higher risk of experiencing various adverse psychosocial consequences (Eyuboglu et al., 2021). Findings have also shown that cyberbullying can disrupt mental and emotional balance and disrupt various aspects of students' daily lives (Carvalho et al., 2021).

Educational Implications

The finding that suicidal behaviours among secondary school students in Udi Education Zone of Enugu State are highly influenced by cyberbullying offers far-reaching education implications. Firstly, it underscores the urgent need for schools to prioritize cyberbullying awareness and prevention as a core educational mandate. When cyberbullying significantly affects students' mental health and leads to suicidal behaviours, schools can no longer treat online harassment as an external or private issue, rather, it must be addressed as a serious educational concern that directly affects learning outcomes and students' wellbeing.

Furthermore, the findings implies that the existing curriculum is inadequate in preparing students to navigate the digital environment safely. There is a strong need to integrate digital literacy, responsible social media use, emotional intelligence, and mental health education into the secondary school curriculum. Such integration would help students develop resilience, recognize harmful online behaviours, and seek help when faced with psychological distress. Education, in this context, must go beyond academic instruction to include the social and emotional competencies required for healthy adolescent development.



Conclusion

The study examined the influence of cyberbullying on suicidal behaviours among secondary school students in Udi Education Zone of Enugu State. Based on the findings of the study, it can be comprehensively concluded that cyberbullying constitutes a serious and pervasive threat to the psychological well-being of secondary school students in Udi Education Zone, Enugu State. The strong influence of cyberbullying on suicidal behaviours among secondary school students indicates that online victimization is not a trivial or isolated phenomenon but a critical educational and mental health challenge with profound consequences for adolescents' emotional stability, academic engagement, and overall development.

The findings reveal that persistent exposure to cyberbullying significantly heightens students' vulnerability to suicidal ideation, self-harm tendencies, social withdrawal, and emotional distress. This suggests that the digital environment has become an extension of the social space, where harmful peer interactions can occur continuously, and with intensified psychological impacts. Consequently, students who are victims of cyberbullying are at increased risk of developing maladaptive coping behaviours that undermine both their learning capacity, and their sense of self-worth.

Recommendations

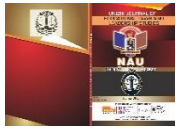
Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made:

1. Secondary schools should intensify cyberbullying awareness and prevention through periodic seminars, workshops, and school-wide campaigns, in order to educate students on the forms, causes, and consequences of cyberbullying.
2. The Enugu State Ministry of Education should ensure the integration of digital citizenship, online safety, and mental health education into the secondary school curriculum.
3. Topics such as responsible use of social media, emotional resilience, peer respect, and help-seeking behaviours should be systematically taught across relevant subjects in secondary schools.
4. Teachers and school administrators should be provided with continuous professional development on cyberbullying and adolescent mental health. Training should focus on early identification of victims, appropriate intervention strategies, and referral procedures for students exhibiting suicidal behaviours.



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