



Cyber Harassment and Gender-Based Violence among Adolescents in Akure, Ondo State, Nigeria

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Abstract

The increase in the use of social media platforms, smartphones and internet means of communication among adolescents has led to a rise in cyber harassment which seems to pose a great threat on psychological wellbeing of students. The study specially investigated cyber harassment and gender-based violence among adolescents in Akure metropolis of Ondo State, Nigeria. The study made use of descriptive and correlation research design. The population of the study comprised all graduated secondary school students in the coaching centers in Akure metropolis of, Ondo State. A sample of 495 students in the selected coaching centers was selected using a random sampling technique. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire titled "Cyber Harassment and Gender-Based Violence Questionnaire" (CHGBVQ). The questionnaire was subjected to face and content validities while test re-test method of estimating reliability was employed to establish its consistency. Data collected were analyzed using descriptive statistics such as frequency counts, percentages, mean, and standard deviation, while inferential statistics involving t-test analysis was used to test the hypotheses at a 0.05 level of significance. Finding revealed that there was a high level of prevalence of cyber harassment among secondary school students in Akure. Finding showed that name-calling, insult, ridicule, teasing online is most common forms of cyber harassment experienced (14.9%). The results further indicated a significant difference between male and female respondents experienced cyber harassment ($t=0.36$; $p<0.05$). Based on the findings, the study concluded that cyber harassment is prevalent among students in Akure, Ondo State. The study recommended that schools should establish anti-cyber harassment policies and organize awareness programmes on responsible online behaviour. Programs that promote gender equality, mutual respect, and healthy relationships among adolescents to reduce discriminatory attitudes and behaviours should be put in place in schools.

Keywords: Cyber harassment, Gender, Violence, Adolescents, Ondo State.

Introduction

The advancement and emergence of digital technology has transformed communication, social interaction, and information sharing across the globe. Social media platforms, messaging applications, and online forums have created new opportunities for interaction, learning, and socialization. However, these technological developments have also introduced new forms of antisocial behaviour including bullying, sexual exploitation, online intimidation, and other forms of gender-based violence among adolescents.

In the years, cyber harassment and gender-based violence have become major social issues affecting adolescents in contemporary society.

The rapid advancement in technology and the widespread use of social media platforms such as TikTok, Facebook, Instagram, and Snapchat have created new avenues for communication and interaction among young people (Nwusu, et al., 2025).

According to Akeusola, (2023) cyber harassment refers to the use of electronic communication devices and online platforms to threaten, embarrass, humiliate, or intimidate individuals repeatedly. Kodichukwumma et al., (2023) described Gender-based violence, on the other hand, involves harmful acts directed at individuals based on their gender, including physical, emotional, psychological, sexual, and verbal abuse. Among adolescents, these forms of violence



often occur through social media, messaging applications, online gaming platforms, and other digital channels.

In Nigeria, the increased in the internet use, smartphone accessibility, and social media engagement among young people seems to have contributed to the increased in the incidence of online abuse and cyber-related violence. Adolescents often experience online threats cyberbullying, cyberstalking, body shaming, impersonation, sextortion, and the non-consensual sharing of private information or images. Studies have shown that young people are particularly vulnerable to gender-based violence and cyber harassment due to peer pressure, emotional immaturity, curiosity, and inadequate parental supervision ().

In Ondo State, the increasing use of smartphones and social media platforms among secondary school students has created both educational opportunities and social challenges. Almost all adolescents in urban communities which Akure is inclusive are frequently exposed to online interactions that may result in harassment, emotional abuse, or exploitation. Chukwuere, et al., (2017) observed that adolescents are particularly vulnerable to cyber harassment and gender-based violence because of their increased exposure to the internet, peer influence, emotional immaturity, and desire for social acceptance. Furthermore, cultural beliefs, gender stereotypes, and weak enforcement of cybercrime and gender protection laws contribute to the persistence of cyber harassment and gender-based violence in Nigerian society (Okoiye, et al., 2015). Female adolescents are often more exposed to online sexual harassment, body shaming, and exploitation, while male adolescents may also experience cyberbullying, threats, and emotional abuse (Li, 2006). These experiences can lead to serious psychological, emotional, academic, and social consequences such as depression, anxiety, low self-esteem, fear, social withdrawal, poor academic performance, and suicidal thoughts. Olasanmi, et al., (2020) maintained that cases of

online insults, bullying, fake accounts, circulation of explicit content, and gender-related discrimination are becoming common among teenagers. Despite these growing concerns, many victims fail to report incidents due to fear of stigmatization, shame, victimization, or lack of trust in authorities.

In many societies, including Nigeria, the increasing rate of internet accessibility and smartphone usage among teenagers has contributed significantly to the spread of online abuse and harassment (Kodichukwumma, et al., 2023). Despite efforts by governments, schools, parents, and non-governmental organizations to address gender-based violence, many cases of cyber harassment among adolescents remain unreported due to fear, shame, stigmatization, and lack of adequate support systems. Therefore, there is a growing need to investigate the prevalent, forms, and effects of cyber harassment on gender-based violence among adolescents in Ondo State. This study is important because it will help educators, parents, policymakers, and security agencies understand the nature of the problem and develop effective strategies for prevention, intervention, and protection of adolescents in the digital environment. This study seeks to contribute to existing knowledge by investigating the prevalence and impact of cyber harassment and gender-based violence among adolescents and suggesting measures to reduce its occurrence and protect young people in the digital environment.

Statement of the Problem

The rapid increase and widespread of internet access and social media usage among adolescents has significantly changed the way young people communicate and interact in contemporary society. While digital platforms provide opportunities for learning, entertainment, and social connection, they have also increased the exposure of adolescents to cyber harassment and gender-based violence. In Ondo State, many adolescents actively use social media platforms for daily communication, making them vulnerable to online bullying, threats, sexual harassment, body



shaming, impersonation, blackmail, and other forms of technology-facilitated abuse.

Cyber harassment and gender-based violence among adolescents have become growing social and psychological concerns in schools and communities. Reports of online intimidation, circulation of offensive messages, sharing of private images without consent, cyberstalking, and emotional abuse continue to increase among young people. Female adolescents are often more vulnerable to online sexual harassment and exploitation, while male adolescents may also experience cyberbullying, humiliation, and threats through digital platforms.

Despite the increasing prevalence of these online abuses, many cases remain unreported due to fear of stigmatization, shame, victimization, lack of parental support, and inadequate reporting mechanisms. Some victims prefer to remain silent rather than seek help, thereby allowing the problem to persist and escalate. Furthermore, there appears to be insufficient awareness among adolescents, parents, and teachers regarding the psychological and emotional consequences associated with cyber harassment and gender-based violence.

The effects of cyber harassment and gender-based violence on adolescents are enormous. Victims often experience anxiety, depression, fear, emotional trauma, low self-esteem, social withdrawal, poor academic performance, and difficulty concentrating in school activities. In severe situations, persistent online abuse may lead to self-harm, aggression, or suicidal thoughts among affected adolescents. Although government agencies, schools, and non-governmental organizations have introduced various campaigns and policies aimed at addressing violence and cyber-related crimes, the problem continues to exist among adolescents in Ondo State. There is limited empirical evidence on the nature, causes, prevalence, and effects of cyber harassment and gender-based violence

among adolescents within the state. Therefore, the problem of this study is to investigate the prevalence of cyber harassment and gender-based violence among adolescents in Ondo State.

Review of Literature

Cyber harassment

Cyber harassment popularly refers to as online harassment is the use of digital technologies (social media, email, messaging) to repeatedly threaten, embarrass, or humiliate individuals, including behaviours like cyberbullying, stalking, and doxing (Kodichukwumma, et al., 2023). **Cyber harassment** is the use of digital communication technologies involving social media, email, text messages, or online forums to intentionally target, threaten, intimidate, or embarrass someone. It involves repeated, unwanted, or hostile behavior designed to cause emotional distress, fear, or psychological harm (Olasanmi, et al., 2020). Gender-Based Violence (GBV) is any harmful act perpetrated against a person based on their actual or perceived sex, gender identity, or gender expression (Nwusu, et al., 2025). Driven by unequal power relations and gender inequality, it targets individuals or groups to assert control and dominance. While anyone can be a target, women and girls are disproportionately affected worldwide.

Cyber harassment and Gender-Based Violence (GBV) among adolescents often referred to as technology-facilitated gender-based violence (TFGBV) which manifest as online abuse, bullying, stalking, and non-consensual image sharing that targets a person's gender or sexual identity. Driven by digital anonymity, this online violence disproportionately affects adolescent girls, amplifying offline gender inequalities (Faucher, et al., 2014).

Research Objectives

The purpose of the study is to investigate cyber harassment and gender-based violence among adolescents in Ondo State.

The specific objectives are to

1. Examine the prevalence of cyber



harassment among adolescents in Ondo State.

2. Identify the major forms of cyber harassment experienced by adolescents in Ondo State.
3. Investigate the difference in cyber harassment experienced between male and female adolescents in Ondo State.

Research Questions

The following research questions will guide the study:

1. What is the prevalence of cyber harassment among adolescents in Ondo State?
2. What are the common forms of cyber harassment experienced by adolescents in Ondo State?

Research Hypothesis

A null hypothesis is formulated and tested at 0.05 level of significance:

1. There is no significant difference in cyber harassment experienced between male and female adolescents in Ondo State.

Methodology

The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. The population of the study comprised all adolescents in the coaching centers in Akure metropolis of Ondo State. The sample of the study comprised 495 adolescents who have graduated from secondary schools, but still undergoing coaching classes in Akure metropolis. They are considered more appropriate to the study because majority of them have access to smartphones and internet use. Simple sampling technique was adopted to select 495 adolescents in Akure metropolis of Ondo State. Nine (9) coaching centers were randomly selected from Akure and its environs. Stratified sampling technique was adopted to 28 boys and 27 girls from each of the selected coaching centers. A structured questionnaire entitle 'Cyber Harassment and Gender-Based Violence Questionnaire'

(CHGBVQ) was used for data collection. Face and content validities were employed to validate the scale. Test – retest method of estimating reliability was conducted to establish the reliability of the scale. The data collected from pilot study were subjected to Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) and the reliability coefficient value of 0.72 was obtained. The services of research assistant was employed to help in administering the instrument to 495 respondents across the selected coaching centers in Akure, Ondo State, Nigeria. Data collected was subjected to both descriptive and inferential statistics. Specifically, the research questions were subjected to simple percentage, frequency while the hypothesis was subjected to t-test analysis and tested at 0.05 level of significance.

Result

Research Question 1: What is the prevalence of cyber harassment among adolescents in Ondo State?

To determine the prevalence of cyber harassment among adolescents in Ondo State, score of respondents to the questionnaire items on prevalence of cyber harassment were scored, computed and measured using frequencies and percentage score. The detail is further presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Frequency and percentage prevalence of cyber harassment and gender-based violence among adolescents in Ondo State

Variable	Highly Prevalence	Moderately Prevalence	Not Prevalence
Cyber Harassment	314 (63.4%)	174 (35.2%)	7 (1.4%)

Table 1 revealed the prevalence of cyber harassment among adolescents in Akure metropolis, Ondo State. 63.4% of respondents reported a high level of prevalent of **cyber harassment experienced, 35.2% respondents reported a moderate level prevalent of cyber harassment while 1.4%** respondents reported no prevalent of cyber harassment. By implication, majority of adolescent students in Akure experienced cyber harassments.

Research Question 2: What are the common



forms of cyber harassment experienced by adolescents in Ondo State?

In determining the common forms of cyber harassment and gender-based violence among adolescents in Ondo State, responses of the respondents to the structured questionnaire were score and analysed using frequency count and simple percentage. The result is presented in Table 2.

Table 2

Frequency and percentage of common forms of cyber harassment and gender-based violence experienced by adolescents in Ondo State.

Common forms of cyberbullying and Gender-based violence	Frequency	Percentage
Cyberbullying (name-calling, insult, ridicule, teasing on line)	74	14.9%
Online threats and intimidation	60	12.1%
Body shaming on social media	62	12.5%
Impersonation/fake account	55	11.1%
Cyberstalking (repeated unwanted message/following)	51	10.4%
Non- consensual sharing of images/videos	49	9.9%
Hate speech based on gender	40	8.1%
Sexting pressure or sexual harassment online	49	9.9%
Deepfakes & AI Exploitation (use of AI to fabricate non-consensual explicit imagery or audio)	55	11.1%

Table 2 showed the simple percentage and frequency count of respondents on common forms of cyber harassment experienced by adolescents in Ondo State. The table revealed that cyberbullying (name-calling, insult, ridicule, teasing online) is most common forms of cyber harassment experienced by adolescents (14.9%), followed by body shaming (12.5%). The table also reported that respondents reported that online threats and intimidation (12.1%), impersonation/fake account (11.1%), deepfakes and AI exploitation (11.1%) were also common form cyber harassment and gender-based violence experienced by adolescents in Ondo State. The table further revealed that cyberstalking (repeated unwanted message/ following) (10.4%), Non-consensual sharing of image/videos (9.9%), sexting pressure or sexual harassment online (9.9%) were also common forms of cyber harassment and gender-based violence experienced by adolescents. Hate speech based on gender was the least reported (8.1%).

Hypothesis 1: There is no significant difference in cyber harassment experienced between male and female adolescents in Ondo State.

In testing this hypothesis, score of respondents on cyber harassment on the basis of male and female adolescents were computed and subjected to t-test analysis. The table is presented in Table 3.

Table 3

T-test analysis showing cyber harassment and gender-based violence experienced among male and female adolescents

Variable	N	Mean	SD	df	t	P
Male	252	64.45	5.31	493	0.36	0.00
Female	243	81.02	9.75			

The t-test table 3 showed that the mean and standard deviation of male and female adolescents experienced on cyber harassment and gender-based violence experienced. The table revealed that female adolescents experienced more cyber harassment and gender-based violence compared to their male counterparts ($p < 0.05$). Therefore, the hypothesis was rejected. This implies that there was significant difference between male and female experiences on cyber harassment and gender-based violence.

Discussion of Findings

Finding from research question 1 indicated a high prevalent of cyber harassment and gender-based violence among adolescents in Akure metropolis, Ondo State. The finding agreed with the finding of (Anierobi, et al., 2022). This high rate may be attributed to increased access to smartphones, social media platforms such as TikTok, Facebook, and Instagram, and insufficient digital safety awareness. Finding from research question 2 revealed that cyberbullying (name-calling, insult, ridicule, teasing online) and body shaming on social media are the most common forms of cyber harassment experienced by adolescents in Akure, Ondo State. The finding was in agreement with the finding of Johannis, et al., (2020) that name-calling and insult are very common on social media. The finding of Kibe, et al., (2022) was in line the finding that insult among internet users on the platform of entertainment are very rampant.



Finding from hypothesis revealed that female adolescent experienced cyber harassment more than their female counterpart. The finding agreed with the assertion of Chukwuere, et al., (2017) who maintained that female individual are more exposed to cyber bullying. However, both gender experienced online harassment concerns that require urgent attention from parents, schools, and policymakers. The finding corroborated the assertion of Kim, et al., (2019) that **females experience higher rates of certain forms of cyber harassment than males**, especially harassment that is gender-based, sexual or related to appearance and relationships. Experiences such as online sexual harassment, unwanted sexual messages, cyberstalking, and image-based abuse are more likely to be associated with adolescent girls and young women.

Conclusion

This study examined cyber harassment and gender-based violence among adolescents in Ondo State, Nigeria, with a view to understanding their prevalence, forms and gender-based experience. The findings revealed that cyber harassment is becoming more prevalent and posing significant concerns among adolescents due to the increasing use of digital technologies and social media platforms. Many adolescents experience various forms of online abuse, including cyberbullying, online stalking, harassment through messages, sharing of inappropriate content, threats, impersonation, and other forms of gender-based victimization.

The study further established that impersonation/fake account, non-consensual sharing of images, hate speech based on gender, repeated unwanted message are common forms of cyber harassment in Akure metropolis. The findings also showed that female adolescent experience more online sexual harassment, unwanted sexual messages, cyberstalking, and image-based abuse. The study concludes that cyber harassment and gender-based violence pose serious threats to the healthy development and

wellbeing of adolescents in Ondo State.

Recommendations

1. Schools should incorporate digital literacy and cyber safety education into their curriculum to help students understand cyber harassment, its consequences, and appropriate online behaviour.
2. Schools in Akure should integrate cyber safety and digital citizenship education into their curricula to equip adolescents with the knowledge and skills needed to identify, prevent, and respond to cyber harassment and gender-based violence.
3. Schools and community organizations should implement programs that promote gender equality, mutual respect, and healthy relationships among adolescents to reduce discriminatory attitudes and behaviors

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