

# Investigating Cyberbullying in Federal College of Education Gidan Madi: Types, Levels, Consequences, and Causal Factors

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## ABSTRACT

This research seeks to deepen understanding on Federal College of Education Gidan Madi Sokoto State, prevalence, effects, and causes of cyberbullying in tertiary institutions in Sokoto State, Nigeria, with the bearing on Federal College of Education Gidan Madi, Sokoto States. The study adopted the quantitative descriptive design of research under the positivist philosophy. Data were collected through a self-administered questionnaire that was distributed across four tertiary institutions with 2,000 students sampled in total. Data were subsequently analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics in pursuit of patterns, relationships, and trends. It is uncovered that all sorts of cyberbullying activities are largely perpetrated in the environment included are sending offensive messages, spreading false information, creating fake profiles, and excluding victims from online communities, while messaging applications and social media serve as their avenues. Cyberbullying factors include anonymity; peer pressure; political and religious tensions; and some level of nonawareness of the policy toward combating the menace in the institution by the victim or some perpetrators. Reported consequences of cyberbullying include emotional distress and poor self-esteem, onset of decline of academic performances, and social isolation. The study further reveals the major gaps that exist in institutional awareness campaigns and on preventive measures; thus, most students remain unaware of such policies and those who may be aware are mostly hesitant to report incidents. Some of the recommendations would be to put down and implement clear anti-cyberbullying policies; strengthening awareness programs; developing campaigns for good digital behaviour; and strengthening reporting and support mechanisms. This research contributes to understanding cyberbullying dynamics in Nigerian higher education and aims at providing evidence-based guidance to policymakers, educators, and administrators on measures to alleviate its harmful effects.

**Keywords:** Cyberbullying, College students, Types of cyberbullying, Levels of cyberbullying, Consequences of cyberbullying, Causal factors of cyberbullying, Online harassment, Cyber victimization.

## INTRODUCTION

Cyberbullying has emerged as a pressing challenge in the digital age, particularly within academic environments. With the rapid growth of technology and the increasing reliance on digital communication, tertiary institutions have become highly vulnerable to this phenomenon. Cyberbullying manifests in various forms, such as sending intimidating messages, spreading malicious rumours, and engaging in public shaming on social media platforms. These acts of online harassment can inflict profound emotional and psychological distress on victims, leading to anxiety, depression, and even withdrawal from academic activities. The issue becomes even more pronounced in academic settings, where the pressure to excel is already significant. Victims of cyberbullying often struggle to maintain their focus and productivity, as the mental strain associated with harassment adversely impacts their academic performance (Yildiz Durak et al., 2024a).

Additionally, the fear of being targeted can hinder students and staff from fully engaging in digital spaces designed to enhance learning and collaboration, further diminishing their educational experience. In Sokoto State, where tertiary institutions play a critical role in developing the intellectual and social capacity of future leaders, the prevalence of cyberbullying raises significant concerns. The increasing dependence on digital platforms for academic and personal interactions has created opportunities for perpetrators to exploit the

anonymity and reach of online spaces. This has led to an alarming rise in cases of cyberbullying, affecting not only individual victims but also the broader institutional community (Shaikh et al., 2021).

1. Cyberbullying in tertiary institutions has become a significant concern, threatening the mental and emotional well-being of students and staff while disrupting academic environments. In Sokoto State, the growing reliance on digital platforms has increased exposure to online harassment, which often goes unreported due to fear of retaliation, stigma, or a lack of confidence in institutional support systems.
2. The effects of cyberbullying are far-reaching, leading to poor academic performance, social isolation, and long-term psychological harm for victims.
3. Additionally, it fosters a toxic digital culture that undermines the safe and inclusive atmosphere required for effective learning.
4. Despite these challenges, there is limited empirical data on the nature, causes, and consequences of cyberbullying in FCE Gidan Madi, making it difficult to develop targeted interventions.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Though little is known about cyberbullying in higher education, it may and does happen here as well. For instance, they found that in their sample of 613 university students, more than 50% of undergraduate students knew someone who had been cyberbullied. This result has been confirmed by other research. Technology, however, is a significant part of higher education, serving both academic and social needs. Students frequently engage in online communication among one another. An increasing popularity of university undergraduates now enroll in online courses. This style of learning frequently necessitates online parallel and/or asynchronous connection with others (Hayes-Mcelroy, 2021a). Such circumstances, in which interaction occurs online, already have potential to result in cyberbullying. But it's unclear if cyberbullying happens as commonly in university education as it does in or before classes.

**Cyberbullying and Internet:** Cyberbullying seems to be a carefully planned, reinforced, and hostile pattern of behavior by a person or group of people intended to harm others. It usually includes the use of information and communications technology such as e-mail, cell phone and pager text messages, instant messaging, blogs, online games, and defamatory online personal polling web sites. Numerous people might be harmed by cyberbullying because of factors including anonymity, accessibility to technological communication, and quick audience diffusion. According to (Evangelio et al., 2022a) much research, college students use the Internet more frequently and extensively than almost any other community. 97% of young adults between the ages of 18 and 29 just used the Internet, email, or a personal device to connect to the network, according to a 2014 Pew Institute poll of known probability Americans. 91% of them had been students in higher education (Kim et al., 2018)

**Types of cyberbullying:** Cyberstalking transforms harassment into an online crime by having the perpetrator send threatening communications to the victim while harassing them constantly. When a cyberbully transmits harsh or false remarks about an individual toward others, denigration takes place. When a cyberbully, who seems to be someone else sends or uploads intimidating or destructive knowledge regarding a particular individual to other people, they are engaging in disguising, which combines components of harassment and denigration (Lu, 2025). When a person is tricked into disclosing humiliating, personal, or sensitive material, the cyberbully outs that person by posting or sending the material for everyone to see. Exclusion is the purposeful exclusion of people from virtual communities, which instantly stigmatizes the excluded people (Owolabi, 2020).

### Related Theories and Models of Cyberbullying

Cyberbullying has significantly grown as a result of the lack of nonverbal communication indicators on the internet. In the absence of these signs, individuals could unknowingly reveal their most private details to others. Non-verbal indicators like facial gestures and facial emotions are lost when there isn't an individual who can listen to the other person describe their experience (Ibrahim et al., 2024). This might result in the characters in the story sharing more knowledge than they would typically share with that person, or the other person receiving the protagonist's words in the wrong way and getting angry more quickly than when they were confronted directly. It makes sense to build theories regarding the prevalence of cyberbullying on the few research studies that have been conducted on the topic, as some academics see it as bullying that has moved into a new medium (Iileka et al., 2023)

The reasonably well-researched literature on conventional bullying contains contributing elements for cyberbullying. The components that have been found as having a substantial impact on bullying in the are suggested as significant elements to cyberbullying based on the body of available knowledge. These include academic success, bullying, gender, culture, technology use, and knowledge of online safety. It is believed that participation in bullying behaviors predicts cyberbullying and cybervictimization. Gender is also taken into account because it has a big impact on bullying both online and in schools (Ndibalema, 2024). Numerous studies have revealed that male students are more likely than female students to both bully and be bullied. The fact that male students are more likely to use unpleasant methods on their peers is a crucial consideration (Mary Juliana et al., 2016a).

### Theoretical Framework of the Study

The Concept has additionally been referred to as the primary method for regulating conduct. In the cause of cyberbullying literature, Theory is widely used as a conceptual perspective for structuring of the issue in universities, which is one of the developing concerns causing the cyberbullying in our Institution (Yildiz Durak et al., 2024b). As a result, it outlines the manner of principal of cybercrime. It is utilized as a paradigm to understand the cause of cyberbullying because it emphasizes on ways to prevent such act (Yang et al., 2020). Furthermore, the fundamental theory, often known as operative theorists, has been widely utilized in a variety of cyberbullying, as well as student in universities. Researchers go on to argue that in this perspective, the principle prefers to associate including an intermediary for the cause of bullying. As a result, the framework gains significance of cyberbullying approaches (Evangelio et al., 2022b).

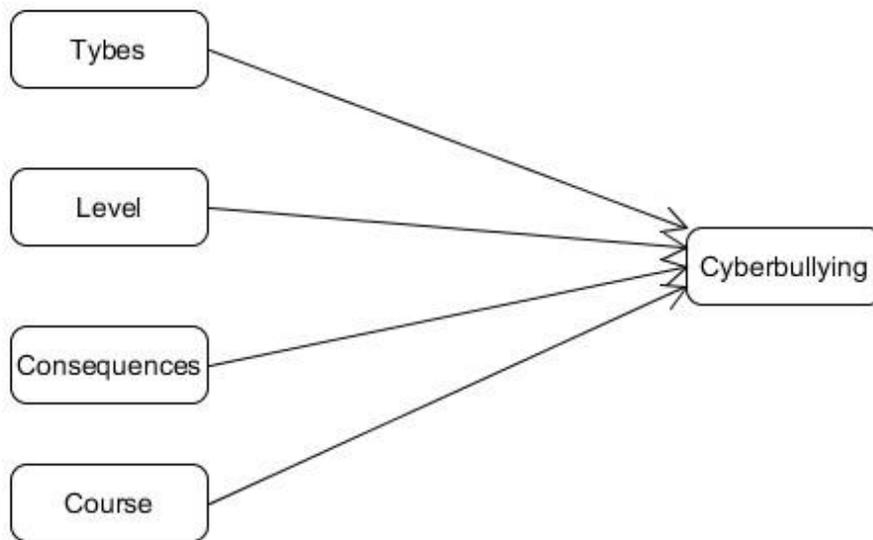


Fig 1: Theoretical framework

## METHODOLOGY

Quantitative research methods were chosen for this study, "Investigating Cyberbullying in Federal College of Education Gidan Madi, Sokoto State: Types, Level Consequence, and Cause Factors," for several reasons. Firstly, quantitative research provides a systematic and objective way to measure and analyze the frequency and prevalence of cyberbullying in the study population. Secondly, it allows for the use of statistical methods to identify relationships between various factors, such as demographic characteristics of students and the incidence of cyberbullying (Sam et al., 2019). Thirdly, quantitative research provides a way to generalize findings to the larger population of tertiary institutions in Sokoto State, as it is based on a sample that is representative of the larger population (Elçi & Seçkin, 2019). The use of quantitative research methods in this study will provide a robust and reliable means of investigating the issue of cyberbullying in Federal College of Education Gidan Madi, Sokoto with a focus on understanding the types, level of consequences, and cause factors of cyberbullying. This information will contribute to the development of effective strategies for addressing and preventing cyberbullying in these institutions (Hayes-Mcelroy, 2021b).

## DISCUSSION

In our comprehensive exploration, we examined a wide range of cyberbullying manifestations, each with its unique damaging impact. These forms included offensive messages, the dissemination of explicit content without consent, the creation of fake profiles to impersonate or mock victims, exclusion from online groups or activities, the spreading of false rumours, manipulation of personal media to embarrass victims, public online humiliation, the dissemination of false information, the use of derogatory language, and the common tactic of hiding behind anonymous accounts. By dissecting these various forms of cyberbullying, our study aimed to highlight the complexity of this issue and stress the importance of recognizing and addressing each of these behaviors. Such awareness is crucial in fostering a safer and more respectful online environment for everyone.

Our investigation centered on the prevalence of cyberbullying and unveiled that it is a concerning issue that impacts students across the college to differing extents. The study illuminated the fact that this modern-day menace has not spared any corner of the educational landscape in the state. It has infiltrated universities, colleges, and other higher education establishments, affecting students from diverse backgrounds and disciplines.

The findings of our research further underscored the urgency of addressing cyberbullying comprehensively and proactively. This digital form of aggression knows no bounds, affecting the mental and emotional well-being of students and creating a hostile online environment that hinders learning and personal development. Moreover, the varying degrees of its impact highlight the need for tailored interventions that consider the unique challenges faced by students in different educational settings. By shedding light on the prevalence of cyberbullying in Gidan Madi Federal College of Education Sokoto State's, our study serves as a wake-up call for educational institutions, policymakers, and society as a whole to take decisive action to protect the welfare of students. Recognizing the extent of this issue is the first step towards implementing effective strategies to combat cyberbullying and foster a more inclusive and safer educational environment. Through our research endeavours, we uncovered a plethora of profound consequences associated with cyberbullying, underscoring its pervasive and detrimental effects on various aspects of individuals' lives. These consequences encompassed a broad spectrum, affecting academic performance, mental health, relationships, physical well-being, online behavior, help-seeking tendencies, self-esteem, self-confidence, retaliatory actions, and even one's perceptions of online interactions.

First and foremost, our findings illuminated the substantial negative impact of cyberbullying on academic performance. Students who experience cyberbullying often struggle to concentrate on their studies, resulting in reduced academic achievement. Mental health bore a heavy burden, as well, with victims of cyberbullying reporting increased levels of stress, anxiety, depression, and emotional distress. Relationships, both online and offline, suffered strain due to the damaging effects of cyberbullying, eroding trust and fostering a sense of isolation. In the realm of physical health, cyberbullying manifested as heightened stress levels, sleep disturbances, and psychosomatic symptoms. Online behavior was also affected, with victims altering their online presence and communication patterns.

Moreover, our research highlighted that cyberbullying had implications for help-seeking behaviors, often dissuading individuals from seeking professional support when needed. Furthermore, it corroded self-esteem and self-confidence, leading some victims to engage in retaliatory actions (Mary Juliana et al., 2016b). Cyberbullying altered how individuals perceived their online interactions, causing them to become more cautious and less trusting, which can detrimentally affect their overall online experience. In sum, our research emphasized the far-reaching and multifaceted consequences of cyberbullying, necessitating comprehensive efforts to combat this pervasive issue and provide support for those affected (Abdulqadir Mustapha et al., 2022).

Our in-depth examination led us to explore the intricate web of factors that contribute to the prevalence of cyberbullying. These factors encompass a range of elements within the digital and social landscape, shedding light on the complexity of this modern-day challenge. Online anonymity emerged as a prominent factor, allowing perpetrators to conceal their identities and engage in hurtful behaviour without fear of accountability. Personal conflicts, often stemming from interpersonal disputes, fuelled instances of cyberbullying, as individuals turned to digital platforms to exact revenge or exert power (Sibanda, n.d.).

Peer pressure played a significant role, with individuals succumbing to group dynamics and participating in online harassment to fit in or avoid becoming targets themselves. A lack of awareness about the far-reaching

consequences of cyberbullying was evident, as some individuals engaged in harmful behavior without fully comprehending the harm they were causing. Inadequate monitoring by authorities and guardians provided cyberbullies with opportunities to operate with impunity. Societal norms and cultural attitudes played a role, sometimes normalizing aggressive online behavior (Pomytkina et al., 2021). The competition for online popularity and validation fueled cyberbullying, as individuals sought to gain attention through harmful actions. The absence of swift and meaningful consequences for cyberbullies allowed the problem to persist. Lastly, the rapid spread of information on digital platforms facilitated the swift dissemination of hurtful content, amplifying the harm inflicted on victims (Chukwuere et al., 2021). Our exploration of these contributing factors underscores the multifaceted nature of cyberbullying, highlighting the need for a comprehensive approach that addresses these elements to effectively combat this pervasive issue and create a safer online environment for all.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, it is imperative for tertiary institutions to take proactive measures in addressing the issue of cyberbullying. One vital step is the establishment of comprehensive educational programs aimed at raising awareness about cyberbullying, its dire consequences, and effective prevention strategies. These programs should be seamlessly integrated into the educational curriculum and conducted on a regular basis. The integration of comprehensive cyberbullying awareness and prevention programs into the curriculum of tertiary institutions is a crucial step towards combating this pervasive issue. It not only equips students with the necessary tools to protect themselves and others but also fosters a supportive and inclusive educational environment that promotes responsible online conduct.

Counselling and Support Services, institutions should take a proactive stance in providing accessible counselling and support services to assist victims of cyberbullying in managing the emotional and psychological impact of their experiences. Recognizing the profound toll that cyberbullying can take on an individual's mental wellbeing, offering readily available support is essential.

Reporting Mechanisms, to combat cyberbullying effectively, educational institutions should establish a dedicated, anonymous reporting system accessible through various channels, appoint a specialized office to handle reports, conduct regular awareness campaigns, ensure timely responses, provide comprehensive support services for victims, conduct impartial investigations, enforce appropriate consequences, prevent retaliation against whistleblowers, and regularly evaluate and improve the reporting mechanisms and overall response system. Strengthening Institutional Policies, Tertiary institutions must prioritize a comprehensive review and enhancement of their policies to effectively address the issue of cyberbullying within their academic communities. This involves several critical steps, beginning with the development of clear definitions and guidelines that unmistakably outline what constitutes cyberbullying behaviours.

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