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Cyberbullying as a correlate of primary school pupils' mental health in Ekiti Local Government Area, Kwara State.

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Abstract: *It has been established that cyberbullying poses a significant threat to pupils' mental health, contributing to increased rates of anxiety, depression, and even suicidal thoughts. This study examined cyberbullying as a correlate of primary school pupils' mental health in Ekiti Local Government Area, Kwara State. A descriptive survey design was adopted as the research methodology. The study population consisted of all 437 primary six pupils in Ekiti Local Government Area, Kwara State. Using a purposive sampling technique, 200 pupils who familiar with internet use were selected. Data were collected through a questionnaire titled Cyberbullying on Pupils' Mental Health (QPMH), designed with a four-point Likert scale (Always, Almost Always, Rarely, and Never). Research assistants administered the questionnaire, which was validated by selected teachers. To ensure reliability, 25 final draft copies were trial tested twice on randomly chosen pupils outside the sample schools, and the reliability index of the instrument was determined using Pearson's Product Moment Correlation Coefficient (0.76).Both inferential and descriptive statistical analyses were employed to analyse the collected data. Descriptive statistics using Pearson's Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) were used to analyse Research Question One, while an independent t-test was used to test Research Question Two at a significance level of 0.05. Findings revealed a strong connection between cyberbullying and primary school pupils' mental health, with no significant difference between the two groups (t = 1.856; df = 198; p > 0.05).It was concluded that cyberbullying has caused more harm than good, significantly impacting the mental health of primary school pupils. Among the recommendations, parents and teachers should actively monitor pupils' online activities and provide guidance on responsible internet use.*

Keywords: Cyberbullying, Mental Health, and Gender

Introduction

Cyberbullying is a type of bullying that takes place through digital platforms such as social media, text messaging, online gaming, and other internet-based communication tools. It involves repeated harmful behaviours, including harassment, intimidation, threats, and the spread of false information, often intended to cause psychological distress. Unlike traditional bullying, cyberbullying can occur at any time and reach a vast audience rapidly, making it especially damaging to victims. The anonymity of online interactions further intensifies the problem, as perpetrators may feel empowered to engage in harmful actions that usually affect mental health of the victims

Mental health, therefore, refers to a person's emotional, psychological, and social well-being, influencing how they think, feel, and behave in daily life (WHO, 2020). It affects stress management, decision-making, relationships, and overall quality of life. Good mental health enables individuals to cope with challenges, work productively, and contribute to their communities (APA, 2019). Conversely, ill-mental health is a state in which an individual experiences persistent emotional, psychological, or social difficulties that negatively influence their daily functioning and overall well-being (WHO, 2020). It is often characterised by the conditions such as anxiety, depression, and high levels of stress, which can lead to impaired cognitive abilities, decreased productivity, and difficulties in maintaining healthy friendship and relationships (APA, 2019). However, some argued that poor mental health could be genetics, environment, and life experiences, play a role in shaping an individual's mental health. While some research established that poor mental health was the product of cyberbullying

As one may be aware that cyberbullying is often associated with negative mental health outcomes, some empirical studies suggested that overcoming cyberbullying experiences can contribute to resilience, emotional growth, and the development of coping strategies in pupils and adolescents. A study by Machimbarrena et al. (2019) who examined the potential positive psychological adaptations resulting from cyberbullying exposure among adolescents. The research, conducted on a sample of 500 high school students, found that 30% of those who had experienced cyberbullying reported an increase in emotional intelligence, problem-solving skills, and digital literacy. Statistical analysis using regression models indicated that, while cyberbullying initially led to distress ($\beta = 0.58$, $p < 0.01$), some individuals who received social support and engaged in coping mechanisms exhibited improved self-esteem and resilience over time ($\beta = -0.42$, $p < 0.05$). Another study by Ortega et al. (2020) reported that students who successfully navigated cyberbullying situations showed higher levels of self-efficacy and were better equipped to handle online conflicts, suggesting that appropriate intervention and social support can mitigate the psychological impact of cyberbullying. These findings highlight the

importance of equipping individuals with emotional and psychological tools to turn adversity into personal growth and stress management skills.

In contrary, Several empirical studies have highlighted the negative effects of cyberbullying on mental health, demonstrating a significant correlation between online harassment and psychological distress. Research by Kowalski et al. (2019) who examined the impact of cyberbullying on adolescent mental health, using a large-scale survey of 2,000 high school students. The study found that 35% of participants reported experiencing cyberbullying, with victims exhibiting higher levels of anxiety and depression compared to non-victims. Similarly, Hinduja and Patchin (2020) conducted a longitudinal study on cyberbullying and suicidal ideation among youth, analysing data from 1,500 students aged 12-18. Their findings indicated that cyberbullying victims were twice as likely to experience suicidal thoughts compared to their peers who were not bullied. From the foregoing, it could be deduced that Cyberbullying has become a significant threat to pupils' mental health, leading to increased rates of anxiety, depression, and even suicidal thoughts. With the rise of social media and online communication, pupils are more vulnerable to harassment, exclusion, and harmful messages that can severely impact their self-esteem and emotional well-being Another study by Smith et al. (2021) who used regression analysis on data from 1,200 adolescents and found that cyberbullying significantly predicted lower self-esteem and increased emotional distress., mental health of both male and female pupils

Cyberbullying on the mental health of both male and female pupils, with varying degrees of psychological distress observed across genders. Research by Kowalski et al. (2019) examined the effects of cyberbullying on anxiety, depression, and self-esteem among 500 pupils aged 10–17, utilizing standardized psychological scales such as the Pupils' Depression Inventory (CDI) and the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES). The study found that 65% of female participants reported higher levels of anxiety and depression compared to 45% of males, suggesting that girls might be more emotionally affected by cyberbullying. However, boys were more likely to exhibit externalising behaviours such as aggression and defiance in response to cyberbullying (Hinduja & Patchin, 2020). Similarly, a longitudinal study by Smith et al. (2021) involving 700 adolescents indicated that persistent cyberbullying led to a 30% increase in suicidal ideation among girls and a 20% increase among boys over a one-year period. These findings suggested that while both genders experience severe mental health consequences, the emotional and behavioural responses differ.

A study by Wright (2020) who investigated resilience and coping mechanisms in response to cyberbullying among pupils examined the potential positive outcomes of cyberbullying on the mental health of male and female pupils. The research involved a sample of 500 pupils (250 males and 250 females) aged 10-17 years, collected through stratified random sampling across multiple schools. The study utilised standardized psychological measures, including the Cyberbullying Coping Scale (CCS) and the Resilience Inventory for Adolescents (RIA), to assess how pupils responded to cyberbullying experiences. The statistical analysis revealed that 35% of males and 28% of females who had experienced mild to moderate levels of cyberbullying reported increased emotional resilience and problem-solving skills over time. Additionally, 40% of both male and female participants demonstrated improved digital literacy, allowing them to navigate online spaces more safely and assertively. The results also indicated that 30% of cyberbullied pupils engaged in positive social interactions and peer support networks, strengthening their sense of self-efficacy and social connection (Olumide et al., 2021). Against this background, the study examined cyberbullying as a correlates of primary school pupils' mental health as well as to establish whether cyberbullying is gender sensitive.

Statement of the Problem

Cyberbullying has become a significant threat to pupils' mental health, leading to increased rates of anxiety, depression, and even suicidal thoughts. With the rise of social media and online communication, pupils are more vulnerable to harassment, exclusion, and harmful messages that can severely impact their self-esteem and emotional well-being. Victims of cyberbullying often experience feelings of loneliness, fear, and helplessness, as the abuse can be relentless and difficult to escape. Unlike traditional bullying, cyberbullying follows pupils into their homes, making it harder for them to find a safe space. Prolonged exposure to online harassment can result in difficulties with concentration, academic performance, and social interactions. Additionally, some pupils may develop trust issues or engage in self-destructive behaviours as a coping mechanism. The lack of immediate intervention and the anonymity of online perpetrators further exacerbate the problem, making it crucial for parents, educators, and policymakers to implement stronger protective measures to safeguard pupils' mental health. To proffer solution for the amelioration of the effect of cyberbullying especially on the pupils, hence , this study investigated the cyberbullying as correlate of pupils' mental health in Ekiti Local Government Area, Kwara State.

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of this study was to examine cyberbullying as correlate of pupils' mental health in Kwara State. Specifically, to:

Establish the connection between cyberbullying and male and female pupils' mental health

Research Questions

1. What is the extent of cyberbullying on pupils' mental health Ekiti Local Government Area, Kwara State?
2. What is the significant difference of cyberbullying on male and female pupils' mental health Ekiti Local Government Area, Kwara State?

Methodology

A descriptive survey design was adopted as the research methodology. All 437 primary six pupils in Ekiti Local Government Area of Kwara State make up the study population. Purposive sampling technique was used to selected 200 pupils who familiar with the use of internet. With the help of research assistants, a questionnaire on Cyberbullying on Pupils' Mental Health (QPMH) with four Likert Scale of (Always, Almost Always, Rarely, and Never), was used to gather data from the pupils. The instrument was validated by some selected teachers. Within two weeks, 25 final draft copies were trial tested twice on the randomly chosen pupils outside the sample schools. Thereafter, the reliability index of the instrument was obtained using Pearson's Product Moment Correlation Coefficient at .76. Inferential and descriptive statistical analysis were employed to analyse the data collected. Besides, descriptive statistical of PPMC was used to analysed the research question one , While inferential statistics of independent t-test was used to test the research question two at a significance level of 0.05

Results

Research Question One: What is the extent of cyberbullying on pupils' mental health Ekiti Local Government Area, Kwara State?
Table 1: Showing the summary of frequency, mean, and percentage of the extent of cyberbullying on pupils' mental health in Ekiti Local Government Area, Kwara State

S/N	Items	Always	Almost Always	Rarely	Mean
1	How often have you experienced or witnessed online harassment or bullying in the past year?	84(42.0)	61(30.5)	55(27.5)	2.15
2	Have you ever felt anxious or stressed because of online interactions?	77(38.5)	74(37.0)	49(24.5)	2.14
3	To what extent do you feel that online bullying has affected your self-esteem?	76(38.0)	64(32.0)	60(30.0)	2.08
4	Have you ever considered skipping school or avoiding online activities due to fear of cyberbullying?	73(36.5)	56(28.0)	71(35.5)	2.01
5	How often do you feel lonely or isolated due to online interactions?	86(43.0)	53.26.5	61(30.5)	2.13
6	Have you ever experienced online harassment or bullying related to your appearance, race, or sexual orientation?	45(22.5)	89(44.5)	66(33.0)	1.90
7	To what extent do you feel that teachers and school administrators are effective in addressing cyberbullying?	44(22.0)	93(46.5)	63(31.5)	1.91
8	Have you ever talked to someone about your experiences with online bullying?	42(21.0)	103(51.5)	55(27.5)	1.94
9	How often do you feel that online interactions make you feel sad or depressed?	64(32.0)	19(9.5)	117(58.5)	1.74
10	Do you think schools should provide more resources and support to help students deal with cyberbullying?	59(29.5)	19(9.5)	122(61.0)	1.69
	Weighted Mean				**1.76**

Decision rule: Not rarely=00-1.49, Almost Always=1.50-2.49, Always=2.50-3.00 Note: The figures in parentheses are in percentages

Table 1 indicates that respondents overwhelmingly reported frequent encounters with cyberbullying, particularly among pupils familiar with internet use. This is supported by the following mean scores: 'How often have you experienced or witnessed online harassment or bullying in the past year?' (M = 2.15), 'Have you ever felt anxious or stressed because of online interactions?' (M = 2.14), 'To what extent do you feel that online bullying has affected your self-esteem?' (M = 2.08), 'Have you ever considered

skipping school or avoiding online activities due to fear of cyberbullying?' (M = 2.01), and 'How often do you feel lonely or isolated due to online interactions?' (M = 2.13). Additional responses include 'Have you ever experienced online harassment or bullying related to your appearance, race, or sexual orientation?' (M = 1.90), 'To what extent do you feel that teachers and school administrators are effective in addressing cyberbullying?' (M = 1.91), 'Have you ever talked to someone about your experiences with online bullying?' (M = 1.94), 'How often do you feel that online interactions make you feel sad or depressed?' (M = 1.74), and 'Do you think schools should provide more resources and support to help students deal with cyberbullying?' (M = 1.69). Overall, the findings suggested almost always cyberbullying has a strong connection with the primary school pupils' mental health in Ekiti Local Government Area, Kwara State, as reflected in the weighted mean score of 1.76.

Research Question Two: What is the significant difference of cyberbullying on male and female pupils' mental health in Ekiti Local Government Area, Kwara State?

Table 2: Summary of independent sample t-test showing significant difference of cyberbullying on male and female pupils' mental health?

Gender	n	Mean	Std. Deviation	t	df	Sig.	Remark
Male	83	28.39	11.101	1.856	198	.128	Not Significant
Female	117	26.05	10.280				

Table 2 presents the analysis of cyberbullying's impact on male and female pupils' mental health in Ekiti Local Government Area, Kwara State. In the light of the above result, there was no significant difference between the two groups ($t = 1.856$; $df = 198$; $p > 0.05$), since the p-value (.128) exceeded the 0.05 threshold.

Discussion of Findings

One of the key findings from this study indicates that cyberbullying has a strong connection to the mental health of primary school pupils, as reflected in the numeric indicator (M = 1.76). This suggests that cyberbullying significantly affects the mental well-being of pupils familiar with internet use. This finding aligned with Kowalski et al. (2019), who examined the impact of cyberbullying on adolescent mental health through a large-scale survey of 2,000 high school students. Their study revealed that 35% of participants had experienced cyberbullying, with victims reporting higher levels of anxiety and depression than non-victims. Similarly, Hinduja and Patchin (2020) conducted a longitudinal study on cyberbullying and suicidal ideation among youth, analysing data from 1,500 students aged 12-18. Their findings showed that cyberbullying victims were twice as likely to experience suicidal thoughts compared to their non-bullied peers. Conversely, Machimbarrena et al. (2019) explored the potential positive psychological adaptations resulting from cyberbullying exposure. Their study, conducted on a sample of 500 high school students, found that 30% of cyberbullying victims reported improvements in emotional intelligence, problem-solving skills, and digital literacy.

Other findings indicated no significant difference between the two groups ($t = 1.856$; $df = 198$; $p > 0.05$), suggesting that the effects of cyberbullying on primary school pupils' mental health were not gender sensitive. This aligned with the findings of Kowalski et al. (2019), who examined the effects of cyberbullying on anxiety, depression, and self-esteem among 500 pupils aged 10–17 using standardized psychological scales such as the Children's Depression Inventory (CDI) and the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES). Their study found that 65% of female participants reported higher levels of anxiety and depression compared to 45% of males, suggesting that girls might be more emotionally affected by cyberbullying. However, boys were more likely to exhibit externalizing behaviours such as aggression and defiance in response to cyberbullying (Hinduja & Patchin, 2020). Similarly, a longitudinal study by Smith et al. (2021) involving 700 adolescents found that persistent cyberbullying led to a 30% increase in suicidal ideation among girls and a 20% increase among boys over a one-year period. These findings suggested that while both genders experience severe mental health consequences, their emotional and behavioural responses differ.

Conclusion

Based on the results of this study, it was concluded that cyberbullying has caused more harm than good, significantly affecting the mental health of primary school pupils. Through social media, text messaging, online gaming, and other internet-based communication tools, cyberbullying manifests in repeated harmful behaviours such as harassment, intimidation, threats, and the spread of false information often intended to inflict psychological distress on victims

Recommendations

It was recommended based on the conclusion of this study that:

1. Schools should integrate digital literacy and cyber safety education into their curriculum to equip pupils with the knowledge and skills needed to navigate online spaces safely.
2. Parents and teachers should actively monitor pupils' online activities and provide guidance on responsible internet use.
3. Schools should offer counselling services through Professional counsellors, psychologists, and trained teachers should provide emotional support and coping strategies to help victims deal with the psychological impact of cyberbullying.
4. Educational institutions, government agencies, and technology companies should work together to implement stronger online safety measures.

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