CYBERBULLYING IN NIGERIA: A SYSTEMATIC RESEARCH SYNTHESIS ON ITS CONCEPTS, PREVALENCE, OUTCOMES, INTERVENTIONS

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Abstract

   This systematic research synthesis sought to investigate cyberbullying in Nigeria in relation to its concept, prevalence, negative outcomes and intervention. To carry out this review, a systematic search using variations of cyberbullying search terms was performed using some inclusion and exclusion criteria. Results revealed that though some Nigerian researchers have made commendable efforts to investigate cyberbullying among Nigerian youths, the shortcomings in their operational definitions of cyberbullying, may lead to the use of cyber aggression interchangeably with cyberbullying. Results also revealed that in contrast to most countries, no intervention program has been designed to address cyberbullying in Nigeria. This finding has implications for researchers in Nigeria. To prevent cyberbullying victims from suffering the long-term or short-term negative effects associated with cyberbullying, researchers in Nigeria are called upon to develop intervention programs that will serve as evidence-based treatment strategies for the victims of cyberbullying in Nigeria. Future researchers in Nigeria should also take into consideration the 3 important criteria for defining cyberbullying and as well extend their investigation beyond university students.

Keywords: cyberbullying, cyber aggression, online harassment, online bullying, Cyber abuse Intervention

Introduction

        Virtually all kinds of activities have migrated online following the emergence of Information and Communication Technology (ICT), and bullying is not in any way exempted. Traditional bullying which was known to occur face to face has also taken a new dimension which is via the internet. This new dimension is commonly referred to as Cyberbullying. Cyberbullying is conceptualized as a form of aggression or harassment that occurs in cyber space. It has been defined by several researchers in the literature and the common characteristic in the various definitions of cyberbullying is its focus on using unspecified electronic device to inflict harm, threats, aggression and hostility on people (Menin, Guarini, Mameli, Skrzypiec & Brighi, 2021). Due to the anonymity with which the perpetrators of cyberbullying operate, research has revealed that that cyberbullying may lead to worse repercussions in comparison with traditional bullying (Ansary, 2020).

        This anonymity is obtainable when bullying a person using a communication technology. The anonymity helps the cyberbullies to inflict psychological blows on the victims, say and do more cruel things than is obtainable in face-to-face bullying simply because they understand they are unlikely to be caught (Yu & Riddle, 2022). Hiding behind their computers or mobile phones, the cyberbullies terrorize and harass their victims. They may go as far as threatening and refraining their cyber victims from exposing the incidence to significant others. In such situations, the cyber victims may slip into depression, anxiety, helplessness etc. In some dire cases, cyberbullying could also lead to the victims committing suicide (Maurya, Muhammad, Dhillon, & Maurya, 2022).

        Due to the negative effects cyberbullying has on its victims, some countries have developed a variety of intervention programs as a way of addressing such cyberbullying related problems (Siddiqui & Schultze-Krumbholz, 2023). Through these intervention programs, victims of cyberbullying can seek psychological help and

or change their behavior in a positive way. However, little is known about the cyberbullying intervention program(s) developed in Nigeria. It is possible that the Nigerian intervention programs may as a result of culture-specific differences yield different outcomes when compared to intervention programs developed in other countries. Also, if any intervention program(s) have been developed in Nigeria, the present research seeks to determine its effectiveness and as well determine how many of them have been implemented.

Also, given the high level of concern cyberbullying raises, this present study seeks to provide a critical synthesis of current existing knowledge on this issue. Until now, no work on systematic review of cyberbullying in Nigeria has been found in the literature. Research on cyberbullying has been focused on definition of the concept of cyberbullying, awareness, incidence, prevalence, outcomes, interventions etc. Meanwhile, if research on cyberbullying is to move beyond these above-mentioned facets, there is a need to conduct a fastidious review on what has already been done in Nigeria and what remains to be done. The broad aim of the present review is therefore to throw more light on those areas of cyberbullying that are still underexplored as it pertains the Nigerian context, so that future research could follow that course. This paper is presented in this manner; Section 1 provides a brief introduction to the study. Section 2 describes the materials and method utilized in the study. Section 3 formulates research questions. Section 4, 5 and 6 provides the results, discussion and conclusion of this study respectively.

Materials and Methods

Identifying Research**.**

This systematic review is mainly to throw more light on those areas of cyberbullying that are still underexplored as it pertains the Nigerian context, so that future research could follow that course. To achieve this aim, the conceptual structure of the PRISMA Flow diagram was adopted (Page et al., 2021)

This study also employed the systematic review method. According to Higgins et. al (2020), systematic review method is appropriate for studies that aim at identifying all relevant empirical findings within the scope of a predetermined keyword or questions, and also aims at interpreting the findings, state reasons for contradictory findings and indicate the limitations of studies. Based on the method adopted, the key phrase of this systematic review study is "Cyberbullying Intervention Program". A search was conducted on Journal articles using the above key phrases. A constraint was placed on the date, filte1ring only works that were published before September, 2021. No further constraint was placed on location or date. Various online databases such as PsycINFO, ERIC, PubMed and ScienceDirect were employed to perform the search. Synonymous key phrases such as 'Cyberbullying Prevention', Cyberbullying Protective factors', Online harassment', 'Online bullying', 'Cyber abuse Intervention' were also used. The titles of articles were first reviewed and if suspected to meet the criteria, the article abstract was checked upon based on the inclusion and exclusion criteria. If the article abstract also fits the current study's key variables, the full text was assessed.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria.

The studies to be included in the current systematic review need to be; (a) Studies on cyberbullying and cyber victimization behaviors measured using quantitative and qualitative measurement tools; (b) studies on intervention addressing cyberbullying with any age group; (c) an article including at least a semi-experimental study method (with a control group); (d) an article documented in English; (e) Intervention implemented in Nigeria; (f) Studies on cyberbullying victimization in relation with its negative outcomes and the incidence rates must have been quantitatively evaluated. Studies were also excluded if they are focused on traditional bullying or violence and if they were conducted outside Nigeria.Dissertations were also to be included in the review to avoid publication bias. Similarly, researches focusing on cyberbullying or cyber victimization outside the environment of educational institutions were to be excluded from the study.

Research Questions

The papers retrieved from the collection of writings on Cyberbullying in Nigeria were sorted and arranged into different themes. The research questions that guided the study were formulated after having carefully gone through the literature and discovered the questions had long remained unanswered and needed urgent attention. Based on previous studies, the following research questions were thus raised;

RQ1: What are the operational definitions of Cyberbullying as proposed by researchers in Nigeria?

RQ2: What are the prevalence rates of Cyberbullying?

RQ3: What are the adverse effects of Cyberbullying?

RQ4: How many Cyberbullying Intervention programs have been developed in Nigeria?

Results

The Definition of Cyberbullying.

Evidence has shown that inconsistencies abound in the literature as regards the definition of the term 'Cyberbullying'. Due to this lack of consensus, it is difficult to answer such questions as -'when can a student really say that he or she has been cyberbullied?' This is because to provide an answer to such question, there is a need to first understand the meaning or definition of the word 'Cyberbullying'. Going through all the definitions of cyberbullying provided in the literature, the basic commonality is that cyberbullying is a kind of bullying that occurs in the digital realm and through the use of electronic device (Kowalski, Giumetti, Schroeder & Lattanner, 2021). This definition however does not meet the proposed accepted criteria of explaining cyberbullying. According to Chan, Cheung, and Lee (2021), a situation must meet three important conditions or criteria before it can be considered to be cyberbullying. First, it must be done repeatedly. The second criterion is that it must be intentional and lastly, it must inflict psychological torment on the victim.

On the other hand, some researchers have argued that a situation need not be done repeatedly before it can be labeled 'cyberbullying' (Ziems, Vigfusson & Morstatter, 2020). The reason being that activities done on the internet, such as defaming a person and posting his private pictures online, tend to have continuous visibility which could repeatedly affect the victim whenever he or she comes across them on the internet. This is to say that though a bullying attack via the internet may have occurred once, it can equally cause an enduring psychological damage to an individual due to its continuous visibility. Attention was also shifted to the adolescents, keen on evaluating their perceptions as to what constitute and what does not constitute "Cyberbullying". A number of studies carried out in this respect have identified 'repetition' as one of the defining characteristics of young people's definition of cyberbullying (Iqbal & Jami, 2022; Menin, Guarini, Mameli, Skrzypiec & Brighi, 2021).

The inconsistences arising from the various definitions of cyberbullying are worrisome given the fact that they hinder generalizability to other studies, and they also prevent valid and reliable measures of cyberbullying from being developed (Chun, Lee, Kim & Lee, 2020). Some researchers however have suggested a number of definitions that share some level of consensus among scholars. The goal of these suggested definitions is to unite the inconsistent definitions of cyberbullying evident in the literature. Tokunaga (2010: 278) defined cyberbullying as "any behavior performed through electronic or digital media by individuals or groups that repeatedly communicates hostile or aggressive messages intended to inflict harm or psychological blows on others". Peter and Petermann (2018: 359) also contributed by defining cyberbullying as "using information and communication technologies (ICT) to repeatedly and intentionally harm, harass, hurt and/or embarrass a target". This present study defines cyberbullying as an act of using electronic devices to repeatedly and purposely threaten, hurt or harass someone.

Operational definitions of Cyberbullying as proposed by researchers in Nigeria.

Another objective of this present study is also to evaluate the operational definitions of Cyberbullying as proposed by researchers in Nigeria. (See Table 1). To achieve this, the conditions or criteria listed by Dehue, Bolman & Vollink (2008), will serve as a guide while keeping the suggested definitions of Tokunaga (2010) and Peter and Petermann (2018) in view.

Table 1

Operational definitions of cyberbullying as used by Nigerian researchers.

Study	Definition of Cyberbullying provided to participants	Operationalization
Okoiye, Nwoga, & Onah (2015).	Cyberbullying involves harassment or mistreatment carried out by an offender against a victim who is physically distant.	CBPQ
Balogun et. al, (2017)	An act of being mean to others by using information and communication involving electronic technologies to facilitate deliberate and repeated harassment or threat to an individual or group which can be done by an individual or group.	NR
Owolabi (2020)	Cyberbullying is the sharing or sending of insults, abuses, taunts, and other similar forms of messages through video, texts, and audio from a perpetrator who is the bully to a victim, usually by the internet and other electronic means.	NR
Nwosu, Ementa & Ejikeme (2018)	Cyberbullying is the leading-edge type of offensive organized in online virtual spaces; Cyberbullying instigates momentous	Adapted CQ

	harm to its victim.		
Ademiju (2019)	NR		SSQ
Adomi, Eriki, Tiemo, & Akpojotor, (2016)	Cyberbullying refers to any harassment which occurs via the internet, cell phones or other devices.		NR

Note: CBPQ= Cyber Bullying Prevalence Questionnaire (Rigby & Slee, 1999); NR= not reported; CQ= Cyberbullying Questionnaire (Smith, Mahdavi, Carvalho, &Tippett, n.d); SSQ= Self-Structured Questionnaire.

Table 1 shows the operational definitions of cyberbullying as used by Nigerian researchers. Only one out of the six studies consulted did not give an operational definition of cyberbullying. While some of the researchers did not report their measures of cyberbullying, those that attempted to measure used different questionnaires namely; CBPQ, CQ and SSQ. This portrays a lack of consensus in their definitions of Cyberbullying. Furthermore, only the study of Balogun et. al (2017) met the generally accepted criteria or condition for defining cyberbullying as identified by Dehue, Bolman & Vollink (2008). According to Dehue, Bolman & Vollink (2008), a situation must meet three important conditions or criteria before it can be considered to be cyberbullying. First, it must be done repeatedly. The second criterion is that it must be intentional and lastly, it must inflict psychological torment on the victim.

What are the Prevalence rates of Cyberbullying?
Interestingly, cyberbullying is a global phenomenon. It cuts across different countries including the developed and developing countries. Recent studies have suggested that globally, cyberbullying is quite prevalent among people within the school age brackets, for example in the U.S.A (Espelage, Hong, & Valido, 2018); in Canada (Riddell, Pepler, & Craig, 2018) and the UK and Ireland (Gaffney & Farrington, 2018). This does not imply that cyberbullying does not occur among the working-class population. It only suggests that cyberbullying tends to be more prominent among young people. Take for instance, in 2011, Wong-Lo and Bullock conducted a study on cyberbullying involving 137 participants among which 62 were adolescents and 75 were parents. Results indicated thhat 90% of the participants from the adolescent group reported having experienced cyberbullying either as a victim or as a bystander. 70% of the victims also reported having been cyberbullied once or twice within a month. Particularly in Australia, studies have also revealed that around 6% to 40% of young people in Australia have been victimized through cyberbullying (Katz et. al, 2014). Nwufo and Nwoke (2018) in their study, also articulated a list of countries with their cyberbullying prevalent rates ranging from 10% to 90%.

In the Nigerian context, the situation seems to be the same. Nwosu, Ementa & Ejikeme (2018) carried out a study in a Nigerian university and it was discovered that students are being harassed online with a range of 48%-57% undergraduates indicating that they have been bullied through various cyber media. Other researchers have also reported a high prevalence rate of cyberbullying in Nigeria and specifically among Nigerian undergraduates (Ada, Okoli, Obeten & Akeke, 2016; Okoye, Nwoge & Onah, 2015; Oyewusi & Orolade, 2014). The high prevalent rates of cyberbullying among Nigerian students suggest that cyberbullying is a crucial phenomenon that deserves intervention.

Table 2
Annotated Findings from Literature on Cyberbullying in Nigeria.

Study	N	Sample Type	Male(%)	Victim(%)	Negative Outcomes
Okoiye, Nwoga, & Onah (2015).	300	In-school adolescents	--	--	Low self-esteem[*], Poor self-concept*, Less efficacious*.
Balogun et. al, (2017)	244	University students	--	67.6	Sadness*,Anger*, Depression*.
Owolabi (2020)	816	Undergraduate students	41.9	--	--
Nwosu, Ementa	140	Undergraduate students	--	48-57	--

& Ejikeme (2018)

| Ademiju (2019) | 450 | Youths | 48.44 | -- | Aggressive Behavior*, Poor emotional health*. |
| Adomi, Eriki, Tiemo, & Akpojotor, (2016) school | 80 | Undergraduate Students | 61.2 | 80 | Anger*, Low self-esteem*,depression* low academic per-formance*, phobia*. |

*Reported association in study is significant.

Table 2 shows the annotated findings from Literature on Cyberbullying in Nigeria. Six studies were found and consulted dating from 2015 through 2020. The sample size of the respondents ranged from 80 through 816. Also, undergraduate students constituted majority of the respondents. No fewer than 48% of the respondents have been victims of cyberbullying.

What are the Adverse Effects of Cyberbullying?

Cyberbullying could lead to a host of negative effects. Foremost amongst them is the negative impact of cyberbullying on the victims' academic performance. Individuals who are victims of cyberbullying are likely to show little or no attention in their academics due to their troubled state of minds. They are also likely to be absent from school which could invariably affect their grades (Alanko, Melander, Ranta & Kaltiala-Heino, 2023). Next is the negative impact of cyberbullying on the victims' psychological well-being. Victims of cyberbullying are likely to be robbed of their inner peace and if neglected could lead to mental and emotional distress. Balogun et.al (2017) also noted that cyberbullying adversely affects the victim's self-esteem, confidence, mental and emotional well-being. Other psychosocial problems include depression, anxiety, stress, suicidal ideation, conduct problems, loneliness, somatic symptoms etc. (Kowalski et. al, 2014). These negative effects could be short or long term and if not handled properly could lead to the victims internalizing their problems, requiring psychiatric help and developing less interest to participate in pro-social activities (Tokunaga, 2010). These negative effects of cyberbullying also justify the need for effective interventions that are designed to change or alter the experiences of victims of cyberbullying into positive ones.

From Table 2, there were also significant association of cyberbullying to negative outcomes such as low self-esteem, poor self-concept, sadness, anger, depression, poor emotional health, poor academic performance, aggressive behavior, school phobia.

How many Cyberbullying Intervention programs have been developed in Nigeria?

 Cyberbullying Intervention programs developed abroad.

Identifying Cyberbullying intervention programs developed outside the context of Nigeria is just a preparatory step for the main study. Many countries have developed cyberbullying intervention programs and these programs have shown significant reduction in cyberbullying behaviors. These programs include No Trap! developed in Italy (Palladino, Nocentini & Menesini, 2016); KiVa program in Finland (Salmivalli, Kama & Poskiparta, 2011); and Cyberprogram 2.0 developed in Spain (Garaigordobil & Martınez-Valderrey, 2014). Other school-based programs are the ConRed and Media Heroes developed and evaluated in Spain and Germany respectively (Del Rey, Casas & Ortega, 2016; Espelage & Hong, 2017).). Of all the programs, Media Heroes is the most thoroughly and strictly evaluated program and has shown significant reduction in cyberbullying behaviors for both the cyberbullies and the cyber victims. However, it appears that none of these well-known evidence-based programs have yet been implemented in Nigeria. Hence, the need to conduct a review on the current state of cyberbullying intervention efforts in Nigeria.

The Present review

 Although, the developed international programs have been effective in reducing adolescents' aggressive behavior and improving their social competence, it is important however to also identify and underline the effectiveness of such interventions within the Nigerian context. As the prevalent rate of cyberbullying continuously rise in other countries, Nigeria is not left out. This review therefore aims to fill an urgent gap by examining the cyberbullying programs implemented in Nigeria so that there will be empirical evidence to better inform the program developers, practitioners, educators and researchers who are interested in this area.
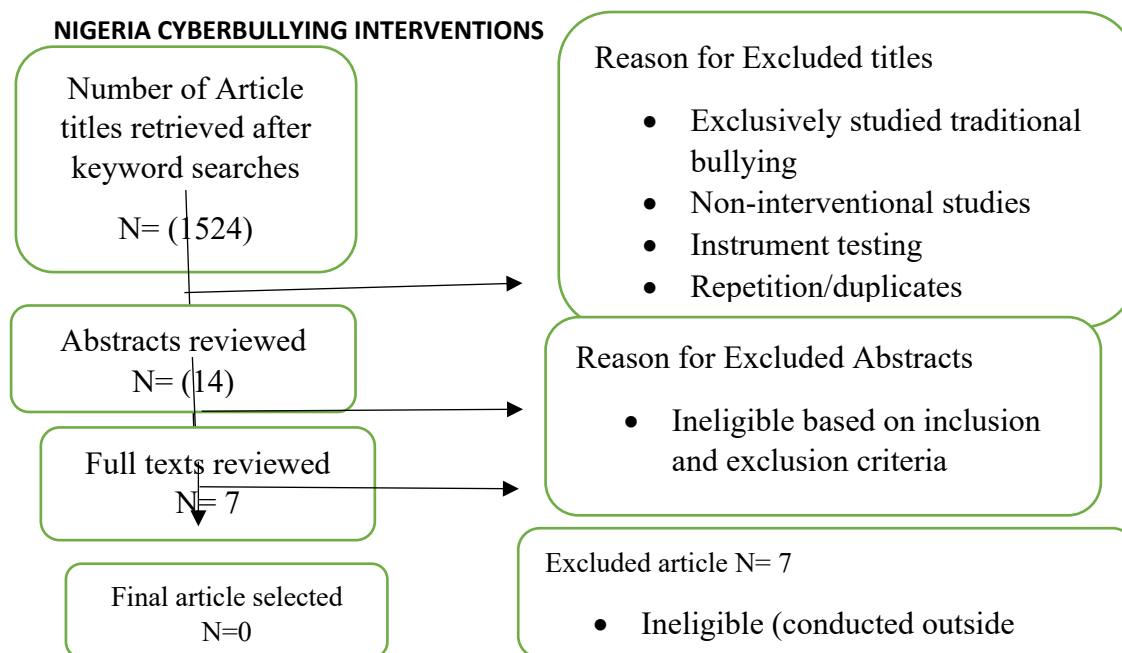
NIGERIA CYBERBULLYING INTERVENTIONS

Number of Article titles retrieved after keyword searches

N= (1524)

Reason for Excluded titles

- Exclusively studied traditional bullying
- Non-interventional studies
- Instrument testing
- Repetition/duplicates

Abstracts reviewed
N= (14)

Reason for Excluded Abstracts

- Ineligible based on inclusion and exclusion criteria

Full texts reviewed
N= 7

Final article selected
N=0

Excluded article N= 7

- Ineligible (conducted outside

Figure 1: Prisma Flow diagram showing the screening process.

The flow chart in Figure 1 also shows that no intervention program designed to address cyberbullying in Nigeria was found in the literature. The 7 articles that would have met all the criteria were articles on intervention programs developed outside Nigeria. This implies that there has not been an implementation of cyberbullying Intervention program in Nigeria   till date.

Discussion

The aim of this systematic review was to throw more light on those areas of cyberbullying that are still underexplored as it pertains the Nigerian context, so that future research could follow that course. Results revealed that most of the operational definitions of cyberbullying as employed by Nigerian researchers were devoid of an important criterion of cyberbullying which is the 'repetition of the aggressive act'. This important criterion of 'repetition" according to Corcoran et. al, (2015) is what distinguishes cyberbullying from cyber aggression. This is an indication that the researchers in Nigeria have different perspectives as to what constitutes "cyberbullying". What this also implies is that the researchers in Nigeria whose operational definitions did not have 'repetitions' may have unknowingly evaluated cyber aggression in place of cyberbullying, hence accounting for the inconsistencies in the way cyberbullying was measured.

Another important finding of this systematic review revealed that undergraduate students constituted majority of the respondents. This implies that the research on cyberbullying in Nigeria has been extensively focused on university students. The fact that this is the case does not imply that cyberbullying does not occur in other strata of the educational system. Students in secondary schools are also likely to have experienced cyberbullying. This is in line with Katz et.al's (2015) findings that young people in their early teens (13-15) are most likely to be reported victims of cyberbullying and that their experience of cyberbullying decrease as they approach late teens. This is also an indication that secondary school students equally deserve special attention as regards cyberbullying. Also, there were significant association of cyberbullying to negative outcomes such as low self-esteem, poor self-concept, sadness, anger, depression, poor emotional health, poor academic performance, aggressive behavior, school phobia. These negative outcomes are not physical but psychological in nature which makes them quite deleterious.

Furthermore, result revealed that no effort has been made to neither develop nor implement cyberbullying intervention programs in Nigeria. This finding is consistent with that of Ozgur (2020). In his study, it was revealed that cyberbullying intervention program has been developed in countries such as Spain, Italy, China, U.S.A., Germany, Finland etc. but not in Nigeria.

Conclusion, Implications and Limitations

Considering the fact that cyberbullying is a form of online aggression that could lead to a host of negative effects including suicide, it was pivotal to conduct a systematic research synthesis of cyberbullying in Nigeria in

order to find out the efforts Nigerian researchers have made to investigate this cyberbullying conundrum. Interesting empirical findings were discovered leading to the conclusion that if future researchers in Nigeria, heed to the findings of this systematic research review, the cyberbullying literature pertaining to Nigeria would at least in the next five years be furnished with correct operational definitions of cyberbullying, consistent measures of cyberbullying and well-designed intervention programs for Nigerian youths who are victims of cyberbullying and definitely not excluding the young teens in Nigerian secondary schools. However, in the meantime, Nigerian classroom teachers and parents can develop some immediate home or lay strategies that seek to address both the academic and psychological problems faced by cyberbully victims in and outside the school context.

Also, the findings of this systematic review has implication for researchers in Nigeria. Researchers in Nigeria should strive to replicate studies that have found evidence-based intervention programs as being effective in reducing cyberbullying behaviors. It does not suffice to only study cyberbullying, its concepts, theories and correlates. It is equally important that efforts are made to develop intervention programs that will serve as treatment strategies for the victims of cyberbullying. This is to prevent them from suffering the long term or short term negative effects of cyberbullying.

While it was interesting to see what was has been done on cyberbullying in Nigeria and what remains to be done, it is important to also highlight that the review has some limitations. First is that the review was limited to the databases mapped out during the selection process. Second is that the researchers were limited to Open access documents as they were unable to log in through their institutions. The third limitation is that the review focused only on articles published in English language.

Competing interest
The authors declare that they have no competing interests in the study

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