Cybercrimes and Socio-Psychological Effects Among Youths and Adolescents in Rivers State, Nigeria

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Abstract
Cybercrimes and socio-psychological effects among youths and adolescents in Rivers State, Nigeria. The purpose of the study was to ascertain the relationships between cybercrimes and socio-psychological effects among youths and adolescents in Rivers State, Nigeria. It specifically determined the relationship between cyberbullying and socio-psychological effects and the relationship between identity theft and socio-psychological effects. The study employed correlational research design. The population was estimated to be 1, 741,168 youths and adolescents between the ages of 13 – 23 years. A sample of 440 respondents was obtained using a multistage sampling technique involving stratified and simple random sampling method. The data collected was from the "Cybercrimes and Socio-Psychological Effects among Youths and Adolescents Questionnaire (CSPEYAQ)" which was duly validated by relevant experts and tested for its reliability using Cronbach's alpha. Simple linear regression analysis was employed at the .05 level of significance for data analysis. The study found a significant positive relationship between cyberbullying and socio-psychological effects (R = .712), R2 = .507), F (738.612) = .000), p < .05). Identity theft was also significantly positive relationship with socio-psychological effects (R = .687), R2 = .472), F (642.020) = .000), p < .05). In conclusion, higher frequency of engagement in cyberbullying and identity theft is correlated with increased anxiety, emotional discomfort, withdrawal from other people and mistrust and other psycho-social problems. The researchers recommended that digital-safety education should be carried out routinely among the youth and adolescents. Confidential and easily accessible counselling services and security system/guidelines should be provided, and available access to reporting of cybercrimes be strengthened.

Keywords: *Cyberbullying; identity theft; cybercrime; socio-psychological effects; youths and adolescents.*

Introduction

Recent Advances in Technology Have Changed the Nature of Communication As technology rapidly progresses, ways in which individuals communicate, conduct business, socialise, participate and learn have undergone extensive evolution. These days, thanks to internet-connected devices, online banking services, social networking tools, messaging applications and learning technologies, adolescents and youths have a valuable means of acquiring knowledge and developing connections regardless of geography. At the same time, there are many avenues

through which this increased reliance on technology may put these young people at risk of cybercrime. Unlike traditional crime which often is tied to a geographical location, a crime that uses digital technology may be perpetrated anonymously, repetitively and across borders. These trends indicate that cybercrime has become an important and topical issue across the spectrum of education, psychology and public health because youths and adolescents are some of the biggest internet users today. The following is a definition and classification of cybercrime. A crime that takes information and communication technologies into consideration either as the means or target of its execution is known as cybercrime (Payne, 2020). In the context of online environments and systems and computers, digital devices or the networks that carry digital communication systems are often involved as both the object and mechanism for carrying out an illegal or malicious act. (Phillips et al. 2022). Cybercrime is usually classified into cyber-dependent (crimes that are not able to be performed without internet technologies) and cyber-enabled (crimes that, due to the use of internet technologies, have expanded reach, reach, velocity, or scope) crimes (Phillips et al. 2022, Gillespie, 2025).

Some examples of cyber-enabled offences are; online fraud, impersonation, identity theft, cyberbullying, phishing (Auwal & Lazarus, 2024). Social-psychological impacts It is equally imperative to briefly examine psychosocial effects as part of the scope of this study. Psychosocial impacts are explained as social, cultural and environmental forces that influence an individual's emotional state or behavioural patterns (Ungar and Theron, 2020).

The quality of interactions an individual has with their environment which includes family, peer school and community that influence mental wellbeing and emotional state is described by the term psychosocial well-being (Pecherkina et al. 2023). Thus, the term socio-psychological effects relate to outcomes involving mental wellbeing, emotions, behaviour and socialisation which could manifest in anxiety, sadness, low self-worth, fear, mistrust and difficulty forming relationship etc (Najafov, 2025). It aligns with the explanation that mental well-being refers to the capability to cope with the stresses of life and make positive contributions to one's environment (World Health Organisation [WHO], 2024). The impact of such effects needs to be addressed in adolescents, because this age group is going through a range of developmental changes, encompassing physical, emotional, cognitive and social development.

Adolescence is described by WHO (2024) as being between the age range of 10 and 19 years, stating that the experiences within this period, shapes who they will grow up to become in terms of their emotional control, their relationships and ability to form identities.

It means that any experience that involves bullying, impersonation, betrayal or the exploitation of their personal identity will inevitably affect their view of themselves and other people (World Health Organisation [WHO], 2024.; Sinkala, 2024). Cyberbullying Cyberbullying is one of the foremost ways youth and adolescents are falling prey to cybercrimes worldwide. In an evaluation in 44 countries and regions, around 15 per cent of adolescents suffered from cyberbullying whereas around 12 per cent reported cyberbullying someone else (World Health Organization Regional Office for Europe [WHO Europe], 2024). There is considerable variance in prevalence rates across different nations, attributed to differences in population samples used, questionnaires utilized, and in recollections for different periods (Surkalim et al. 2022), though the general tendency reveals widespread occurrence. Ghosh et al. (2025) describe the term cyberbullying as a behaviour that takes place through any kind of electronic communication like instant messaging services, gaming consoles or cell phones. The aim is to hurt another person or put him or her to shame, terrorize him or her or make him or her uneasy, annoyed or upset.

Cyber bullying is any type of deliberate as well as repeated attack by way of any form of

electronic devices including smartphone, computer or anything equivalent. This includes threatening remarks, malicious rumors and threats, postings of embarrassing materials, ostracizing, the act of masquerading as another person, and sharing personal information without approval (Zhu et al., 2021). Association between cyberbullying and psychological wellbeing, social development and mental distress has been studied in many researches works. Cyberbullied adolescents tend to experience more fear, depression and social isolation than their peers (Kwan et al., 2020; Li et al., 2024). They are afraid of continued attacks and may anticipate the redistribution of shared materials to the masses. Also, there may be anxiety or insecurity due to the unknown perpetrator (a stranger or an acquaintance/friend) (Zhu et al., 2021). The effects of cyberbullying can be far-reaching on an individual's self-esteem and social adjustment, and an interesting finding from research within Nigeria was that cyberbullying is significantly correlated with social adjustment and self-esteem in college students (Anierobi et al. 2023). Such behaviours can result in social isolation, distrust, and relationship strain. The victim may start avoiding groups online or offline to avoid becoming victimised once again. A potential impact is mistrust, which can occur if the identity of the attacker remains a mystery, even to his acquaintances or friends. Clearly, this behaviour can be viewed as both psychological and social with various factors such as familial influence, social standing, personal issues and school environments possibly impacting the victim's behaviour (Kwan et al. 2020; Zhu et al., 2021).
Evidence on cyber bullying in Africa Although more data has been collected in Europe, the North Americas and Asian countries about this online crime, the available data in Africa has not been adequate, and according to Zhu et al (2021), the Majority of these findings came from higher income nations and upper middle income nations while for Paruk & Nassen, (2022), they noticed an absence of extensive data although findings from their research of Nigerian psychiatric patients showed cyberbullying behaviour (both victims and offenders) in young people. Due to disparities in knowledge concerning cyber safety, availability of support services like counselling services, and reporting structures, the experiences and effects of cyberbullying may be quite unique in developing nations (Ihua, 2026). Identity theft Identity theft is characterized as the Unauthorized access and utilisation of an individual's personal identifying or financial information with the aim of stealing such information in other to use them for one's gain (Federal Trade Commission [FTC], 2021). It can also be referred to as the misuse or unlawful possession of personal or identifying information of another person through various forms of deception or Fraud. (Merdovi & Jovanovi, 2024). Identity theft has to do with unlawful and intended uses of another person's personal identification documents (DeLiema et al., 2021). It has to do with obtaining the personal information of another to apply for credit or loan in the other's name or use the other's personal details for purposes of acquiring products, goods or services, making use of their identity to commit other offences, etc. Young people may be susceptible to identity theft, in that identity can be theft or stolen via phished messages/links, poor passwords, loss of electronic devices, unauthorized access to accounts in social networking media, accounts etc. In essence, it entails accessing your private data and impersonating you (Burnes et al., 2020). This practice has social, emotional, mental and even monetary implications for victims, since they will face issues with loss of trust in other people and loss of control over their personal lives and online identities (DeLiema et al. 2021). In Nigeria, the need for awareness regarding cybersecurity practices in Nigeria have risen following increases in Internet penetration and utilisation (Ugwu et al. 2023), and a survey carried out in a higher education institution identified a lack of cyber hygiene knowlege among staff and students. Some of previous studies conducted in Nigeria has explored the role of cyber bullying in social

adjustments, mental health and self-esteem of college students (Anierobi et al., 2023; Bosah et al. 2025); but these Studies were restricted to universities in Nigeria or did not include areas of Rivers state in Nigeria. In addition to that, there is very limited information on identity theft as it relates to the negative socio-psychological impacts and studies on the subject matter focused mainly on the cost to the victim or adults as targets (DeLiema et al. 2021). Given these contexts, there is an existing gap in current studies concerning how cyber bullying and identity theft is linked with socio psychological impacts of young adults and teenagers in Rivers State Nigeria. The present study will explore these factors in order to develop a better understand of online behaviour among youths and Adolescents and enhance cyber security policies and education among young and adolescents and further expand the body of knowledge on the issue.

Aim and Objectives of the Study

This study aims to examine the relationship between cybercrimes and socio-psychological effects among youths and adolescents in Rivers State, Nigeria. Specifically, the study seeks to:

1. determine the relationship between cyberbullying and socio-psychological effects among youths and adolescents in Rivers State, Nigeria.
2. examine the relationship between identity theft and socio-psychological effects among youths and adolescents in Rivers State, Nigeria.

Research Questions

The following research questions are formulated to guide the study:

1. What is the relationship between cyberbullying and socio-psychological effects among youths and adolescents in Rivers State, Nigeria?
2. What is the relationship between identity theft and socio-psychological effects among youths and adolescents in Rivers State, Nigeria?

Research Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses are formulated for the study:

1. There is no significant relationship between cyberbullying and socio-psychological effects among youths and adolescents in Rivers State, Nigeria.
2. There is no significant relationship between identity theft and socio-psychological effects among youths and adolescents in Rivers State, Nigeria.

Methodology

The study utilized a correlational research design. The research design was considered apt since it allowed the researcher to assess the direction and magnitude of the relationship between cyberbullying, identity theft and socio-psychological effects without manipulating variables (Lau, 2017). The population of study was estimated to be 1,741,168 youth and adolescents of age 13-23 years in Rivers State as at 2023 and derived from the total projected population for the state for the year 2023 of 7,616,859 and Nigeria's population age distribution from National Bureau of Statistics (2023).

Taro Yamane formula with 0.05 level of precision was employed to determine the sample size. With (N=1,741,168) and (e=0.05) sample size was approximately 400 respondents. An extra 10 per cent attrition allowance of 40 was included for missing response and incompletely filled questionnaires thus yielding a revised sample size of 440. An extra sample was also provided as buffer to secure sufficient respondents after non-participating or missing questionnaire return

(Bujang, 2021). Multi stage sampling procedure using stratification and simple random sampling techniques was used. The population was stratified into three senatorial districts, few selected local government areas and the two age groups namely 13-17years and 18-23 years respectively. Simple random sampling was used to sample from each stratum proportional to the size of the strata. Data was collected using structured questionnaire titled "Cybercrimes and Socio-Psychological Effects among Youths and Adolescents Questionnaire (CSPEYAQ)". The instrument comprised four sections. Section A elicited demographic data, while Sections B, C and D measures Cyberbullying, identity theft and socio-psychological effects respectively. The instrument was a modified four-point Likert type scale with items rated as Strongly Agree (SA=4), Agree (A=3), Disagree (D=2), Strongly Disagree (SD=1). The instrument was subjected to face and content validation by experts in Guidance and Counselling, Psychology, Sociology or Criminology and Measurement and Evaluation. The reliability of the instrument was tested using a trial group and the result was analyzed using Cronbach's alpha technique. The instrument was administered by the researcher with the help of trained research assistants. Written informed parental or guardian's consent was sought for participants under 18years and written informed consent was sought from participant from18years and above. Data collected was coded and analyzed using simple linear regression analysis. Simple linear regression analysis was used to test the hypothesis at 0.05 level of significance.

Presentation of results

Research hypothesis one

To test hypothesis one, which stated that there is no significant relationship between cyberbullying and socio-psychological effects among youths and adolescents in Rivers State, simple linear regression analysis was conducted. Cyberbullying was treated as the independent variable, while socio-psychological effects constituted the dependent variable. As presented in Table 1, the result yielded a correlation coefficient of (R = .712), indicating a strong positive relationship between cyberbullying and socio-psychological effects among youths and adolescents. The coefficient of determination, (R^2 = .507), shows that cyberbullying accounted for 50.7% of the variation in socio-psychological effects, while the adjusted (R^2) value of .506 indicates that 50.6% of the variation was explained after adjusting for the sample size and number of predictors.The analysis of variance produced an F-ratio of 738.612 with a significance value of (p = .000), which is less than the .05 level of significance. This indicates that the regression model was statistically significant. The regression coefficient for cyberbullying was also significant ((B = .612), (Beta = .712), (t = 27.177), (p = .000)). Consequently, the null hypothesis was rejected. Therefore, there is a significant positive relationship between cyberbullying and socio-psychological effects among youths and adolescents in Rivers State. The regression equation for predicting socio-psychological effects was: Socio-psychological effects = 9.283 + .612 (Cyberbullying). This finding implies that an increase in cyberbullying is associated with a corresponding increase in socio-psychological effects among youths and adolescents in Rivers State.

Table 1: Simple regression analysis of the relationship between cyberbullying and socio-psychological effects among youths and adolescents

Source of variation	SS	Df	MS	F-ratio	Sig.
Regression	3268.607	2	3268.607		
Residual	3177.391	438	4.425	738.612*	.000
Total	6445.999	439			
Model	B	Std error	Beta	t	Sig.
Constant	9.283	.484		19.160	.000
Cyberbullying	.612	.023	.712	27.177	.000

*Significant at .05 level, R = .712, R^2 = .507, Adjusted R^2 = .506

Research hypothesis two

To test hypothesis two, which stated that there is no significant relationship between identity theft and socio-psychological effects among youths and adolescents in Rivers State, a simple linear regression analysis was conducted. Identity theft was treated as the independent variable, while socio-psychological effects constituted the dependent variable. As presented in Table 2, the result yielded a correlation coefficient of (R = .687), indicating a strong positive relationship between identity theft and socio-psychological effects among youths and adolescents. The coefficient of determination, (R^2= .472), shows that identity theft accounted for 47.2% of the variation in socio-psychological effects. The adjusted (R^2) value of .471 further indicates that 47.1% of the variation in socio-psychological effects was explained by identity theft after adjusting for the sample size and model parameters.The analysis of variance produced an F-ratio of 642.020 with a significance value of (p = .000), which is less than the .05 level of significance. This indicates that the regression model was statistically significant. The regression coefficient for identity theft was also significant ((B = .603), (Beta = .687), (t = 25.338), (p = .000)). Consequently, the null hypothesis was rejected. Therefore, there is a significant positive relationship between identity theft and socio-psychological effects among youths and adolescents in Rivers State. The regression equation for predicting socio-psychological effects was: Socio-psychological effects = 9.408 + .603 (Identity theft). This finding implies that an increase in identity theft is associated with a corresponding increase in socio-psychological effects among youths and adolescents in Rivers State.

TABLE 2: Simple regression analysis of the relationship between identity theft and socio-psychological effects among youths and adolescents

Source of variation	SS	Df	MS	F-ratio	Sig.
Regression	3042.941	2	3042.941		
Residual	3403.057	438	4.740	642.020*	.000
Total	6445.999	439			
Model	B	Std error	Beta	t	Sig.
Constant	9.408	.514		18.291	.000
Identity theft	.603	.024	.687	25.338	.000

*Significant at .05 level, R = .687, R^2 = .472, Adjusted R^2 = .471

Discussion of the findings

The finding reveals that there is a significant positive relationship between cyber bullying and the socio-psychological consequences among youths and adolescents in Rivers State. This means that an increase in cyber bullying the experiences of negative socio-psychological among youth and adolescents are increase. 50.7 per cent variation in socio-psychological consequences is attributed to Cyber bullying, indicating that cyber bullying is a substantial factor correlated with feelings of hurt, distress, fear, anxiety, sadness, loneliness, low self-worth, withdrawal from society, and difficult relationships. But in this instance, the findings should be understood as showing an association rather than causality in terms ofCyber bullying causes such things. The probable explanation for the finding that Cyber bullying is strongly associated with the consequences among the youths and adolescents in Rivers State, could be because of thefact that exposure to insults, threats, harassment and ridicul, public harassment, exclusions or embarrassments from one individual to many through the digital space; Cyber bullies' victims are more likely to be thetarget repeatedly and public humiliation may damage one's sense of belonging. On the other hand, some perpetrators hide behind a veil of anonymity in this new form of abuse thereby causing fear and mistrust among the targeted youths and adolescent in River State. This finding is explained theoretically by the General Strain Theory, which posits that persistent exposure to strainful events (like victimisation), which are viewed as aversive and uncontrollable, is associated with subsequent deviant behaviour, emotions (like anxiety, frustration, sadness, anger) and adaptation styles, where a lack of resources such as skills, coping mechanisms and support from adults or peers would exacerbate these conditions (Ronen, 2021). The finding is similar to the findings of Han et al. (2021) which concluded that Adolescents reporting victimisation by Cyber bullying exhibited significantly higher levels of loneliness, and lower resilient coping skills in comparison with those who have not been exposed to cyber bullying, and Wright (2024) found that Cyber bullying experiences in secondary school were associated with significantly greater psychological problem, though it may be alleviated by family support. In agreement with Hu et al. (2021) which used meta-analysis approach, analysing fifty-seven studies consisting of 105,440 samples revealed a significant positive association betweenCyber bullying and depression, in support of Halliday et al. (2024) who identified Cyber bullying and bullying experiences in general to be strongly associated with increase of sadness and worry and reduction of the feelings of happiness, life satisfaction, and a significant deficit in emotional regulation for early adolescents, confirming that cyber bullying is not an innocent form of fun and interaction but a significant online threat that harm youths. The finding reveals that there is a significant positive relationship between Identity Theft and the socio-psychological consequences among youths and adolescents in Rivers State. The study revealed that as identity theft experiences increases, the socio-psychological consequences among them increases too. Identity Theft has 47.2per cent influence on socio-psychological consequences of cybercrimes among youth and adolescents in Rivers State, this could be an indication that the loss of control over one's personal information, identity, accounts or property online can cause significant psychological and emotional difficulties, such as fear, anxiety, and a feeling of personal violation, that is youth that suffer identity theft are at higher risk for psychological problems like emotional instability, distrust and withdrawal from social circle and that these problems may cause psychological instability, anxiety, feelings of embarrassment, mistrust and social isolation.

The probable explanation for the finding is because Identity Theft undermines youths and adolescents' sense of security and personal autonomy. When their identities or personal data are stolen, they can fear future breaches, public exposure, and damage to their reputations. The

process of recovering from the theft and restoring compromised accounts or correcting erroneous information can be time-consuming and emotionally draining, leading to feelings of powerlessness and frustration. As explained by the Shattered Assumptions Theory, being a victim of identity theft may lead young people to abandon their fundamental assumptions about the world's safety and predictability. The betrayal of trust inherent in identity theft can undermine their belief that people are reliable and that they can control their lives, thus affecting their emotional well-being and ability to engage with the world around them. In line with Borwell et al. (2022) who applied this theory to cybercrime victimisation and found negative impact of cybercrime victimisation on mental wellbeing, with greater negative effects for personal crimes where offenders are known to the victim and lack of compensation to address the financial consequences of the crime. The finding is similar to the findings of Randa and Reyns (2020), which found that the experience of identity theft had significant negative effects on the mental and social well-being of victims, and the length of time spent resolving the crime, financial losses, and prior victimisation significantly affected the level of victimisation that individuals reported, in line with DeLiema et al. (2021) who have concluded that protracted exposure to identity theft and fraud issues, financial and credit problems, family and interpersonal conflict and the time to recovery were associated with the greater likelihood of emotional distress, and Irvin-Erickson (2026) has established that individuals who experienced identity theft were more likely to suffer from more severe mental distress. Similarly, Rothhaar and Niman (2023) establish that both length of time needed for recovery of the theft and the amount of financial loss was associated with both negative emotional outcomes and poor physical well-being. The result conforms to these previous studies in demonstrating that Cyber Crimes have serious consequences that are not just financially driven but have far-reaching impact on the psychological and social well-being of youth and adolescents.

Conclusion

The present study concludes that cyberbullying and identity theft have significant positive relationships with socio-psychological consequences among youth and adolescents in River State. In other words, as young people's exposure to Cyber Bullying and identity theft increase so do their level of emotional distress, anxiety, withdrawal from social activities and loss of trust. In conclusion Cyber Crimes like cyber bullying and Identity Theft have serious implications for the emotional well-being of youth and adolescents and such needs to be prevented through effective prevention strategies and psychological support system for their safety online.

Recommendation

1. Schools, parents and other stakeholders in authority in Nigeria ought to conduct and organize frequent workshops and programs to educate the youth and adolescents on how to prevent and respond effectively againstCyber Bullying.
2. Guidance counsellors and mental health professionals must make provisions of counseling and other psychotherapeutic services readily available to assist youth and adolescents in overcoming depression, anxiety, and trauma associated with the experience of cyberbullying.
3. Educational institutions and parents should educate youth and adolescents on best practices when creating and using password, private accounts and sensitive information online so as to avoid the possibility ofIdentity theft. 4. Law-enforcement authorities and digital service providers should develop quick and accessible report mechanisms for the reporting of identity theft and other cybercrimes.

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