

Peer Relations, Type A Behaviour Pattern and Cyberbullying Among Nigerian Undergraduates: A Correlational Study

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<https://doi.org/10.56201/jhsp.vol.12.no9.2026.pg107.115>

Abstract

Cyberbullying has become an important concern among university students because of the increasing use of digital platforms for social interaction. This study examined the relationship between peer relations, Type A behaviour pattern and cyberbullying among Nigerian undergraduates. The study adopted a cross-sectional correlational design. Participants were 423 undergraduate students drawn from three universities in southeastern Nigeria: Enugu State University of Science and Technology (ESUT), University of Nigeria, Nsukka (UNN), and Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka (UNIZIK). Participants were selected using convenience and purposive sampling techniques. A total of 430 copies of the questionnaire were distributed, 427 were retrieved, and four questionnaires were excluded because of multiple responses or improper completion, leaving 423 valid responses for analysis. Data were collected using the Cyberbullying Questionnaire, Peer Relationship Scale and Type A Behaviour Scale. Pearson product-moment correlation was used to analyse the data at the .05 level of significance. The findings showed that cyberbullying was significantly and negatively related to popularity ($r = -.260, p < .05$) and trust ($r = -.280, p < .05$), while its relationships with intimacy and insightfulness were not significant. Type A behaviour was not significantly related to cyberbullying ($r = .172$). Gender was significantly related to cyberbullying ($r = -.405, p < .01$), whereas age was not significantly related to the study variables. The findings suggest that supportive and trusting peer relationships may be relevant to understanding cyberbullying among undergraduates, while Type A behaviour did not show a significant association in this sample.

Keywords: cyberbullying, peer relations, Type A behaviour, undergraduates, Nigeria

Introduction

Cyberbullying and its consequences

Internet access has changed how young people communicate, study and make friends, but it has also opened new routes for harassment. Cyberbullying, understood in this study as wilful and repeated harm inflicted through electronic text and other digital media, takes several forms. Husna et al. (2020) list harassment, denigration, flaming, impersonation, masquerading, outing and trickery, and cyberstalking among them. In everyday terms this can mean mocking a classmate, posting embarrassing photos or videos, insulting someone's body shape or size, spreading gossip or secrets, running fake accounts to stalk a victim, or circulating edited images. Most of it happens on social media and messaging platforms, where a hurtful post can reach a large audience within minutes.

The consequences for victims are well documented. Cyberbullying has been linked to depression, anxiety, loneliness, suicidal ideation and somatic complaints in adolescents (Nixon, 2014), to lower happiness and life satisfaction among schoolchildren (Navarro et al., 2015), and to reduced self-esteem and academic functioning among Arab American middle and high school students (Yousef & Bellamy, 2015). Other studies connect it with anger, thoughts of violence and disrupted learning (Pilkey, 2011, as cited in Husna et al., 2020), with poorer psychological and physical health and weaker academic performance (Kowalski & Limber, 2013, as cited in Husna et al., 2020), and with lower attachment to school (Schneider et al., 2012, as cited in Husna et al., 2020). Researchers have even developed instruments aimed specifically at capturing the emotional impact of cybervictimisation (Elipe et al., 2017).

Why do some students bully online while others do not? Several correlates have been proposed. Seeing peers cyberbully others appears to raise the likelihood that a person will do the same (Hinduja & Patchin, 2013, as cited in Husna et al., 2020). Low self-esteem, low empathy and loneliness have been associated with cyberbullying perpetration (Brewer & Kerslake, 2015), and the anonymity that online platforms offer also predicts it (Barlett et al., 2016). Gender differences have been reported too: Wade and Beran (2011, as cited in Husna et al., 2020) found cyberbullying to be more often linked to girls than to boys, particularly in school settings. Public concern should still be weighed against the evidence. Olweus (2012) questioned whether cyberbullying is as widespread as public discussion suggests. Even so, it remains a serious problem for the people it touches, and universities, where students rely heavily on digital communication, are not exempt. Much of the evidence cited above comes from school-age samples, while evidence concerning the factors associated with cyberbullying among Nigerian undergraduates is still developing. Related Nigerian university studies have examined psychosocial and behavioural correlates of problematic conduct. Chinawa et al. (2024a), including Douglas John Ufuoma as a co-author, reported that core self-evaluation and loneliness did not significantly predict internet addiction among 247 undergraduates. Similarly, Chinawa et al. (2024b), also involving Ufuoma, found that parental monitoring and parenting styles did not significantly predict deviant behaviour among 156 undergraduates. More recently, Ugwu, Douglas, and Akpoke (2026) reported a small negative relationship between mindfulness and substance use among undergraduate students. Although these studies did not examine cyberbullying, they show the value of testing specific psychological, relational and behavioural factors rather than assuming that every proposed predictor will have a significant association with student behaviour. The present study therefore considers peer relations and Type A behaviour pattern as two distinct factors that may help explain cyberbullying among Nigerian undergraduates.

Peer relations

Peer relationships are widely regarded as a central context for development. Peers are individuals of similar age or level of psychological development, and the way these relationships unfold, whether supportive or marked by exclusion, is tied to adjustment and to engagement with school (Juvonen et al., 2012; Li et al., 2011). Researchers have studied several aspects of peer life, including friendship quality, peer support, and the wider peer culture of a school (Lynch et al., 2013). Aydoğdu (2022) conceptualised peer relationships along four dimensions, namely intimacy, popularity, trust and insightfulness, and these are the dimensions examined here. If a student's need for acceptance and belonging is met through trusting and well-regarded peer networks, there may be less reason to seek status through online aggression. If those needs go unmet, the reverse may hold.

Type A behaviour pattern

Personality offers a second lens. The Type A behaviour pattern was first described by Friedman and Rosenman (1959), who compared men showing an intense, sustained drive for achievement and constant involvement in competition and deadlines with men showing the opposite pattern, and found far higher rates of coronary artery disease in the first group. In the scale used in this study, the pattern is characterised by ambitiousness, aggressiveness, competitiveness, impatience, muscle tension, rapid speech, irritation, hostility and anger (Omoluabi, 1997). Type B behaviour is the more relaxed, less driven counterpart. Because hostility, impatience and competitiveness overlap conceptually with aggression, it is reasonable to ask whether students who score high on Type A behaviour are also more likely to take part in cyberbullying. This study tests that question directly.

Theoretical framework

Two theories frame the study. Choice Theory (Glasser, 1999) holds that all behaviour is chosen in an effort to satisfy five basic needs: survival, love and belonging, power, freedom and fun. Seen this way, cyberbullying is a need-driven choice, and a student who finds belonging and a sense of power through supportive peer relationships has less need to look for them through aggression online. Social Dominance Theory (Sidanius et al., 1991) adds a group-level layer. It proposes that societies organise themselves into hierarchies in which dominant groups hold more power than subordinate ones, and aggression can serve to assert or defend a position within such hierarchies. On campus, popularity and peer status may therefore bear on who feels able, or pushed, to dominate others online.

The present study

The present study examined whether peer relations and Type A behaviour pattern were related to cyberbullying among undergraduate students in a Nigerian university setting. The study extends earlier Nigerian work by considering peer relations together with a specific behavioural pattern rather than examining either a broad personality construct or peer-related factor alone. Two hypotheses were tested:

H1: There will be a significant relationship between peer relations and cyberbullying among undergraduate students.

H2: There will be a significant relationship between personality type (Type A behaviour) and cyberbullying among undergraduate students.

Method

Participants

A total of 423 undergraduate students, aged 17 to 34 years, were included in the study. The participants were drawn from three universities in Enugu and Anambra States through convenience and purposive sampling techniques. The participating institutions were Enugu State University of Science and Technology (ESUT), the University of Nigeria, Nsukka (UNN), and Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka (UNIZIK). The sample comprised 193 students from ESUT, 137 from UNN, and 93 from UNIZIK, giving a final sample of 423 undergraduate students. Participants were eligible if they were full-time undergraduates in the selected institutions. Part-time students, sandwich students, mature students, postgraduate students, visitors and members of staff were excluded from the study. Inclusion criteria: Participants had to be full-time undergraduate students enrolled in the selected institutions. Exclusion criteria: Part-time students, sandwich students, mature students, postgraduate students, visitors, and members of staff.

Instruments

Three instruments were used. Their psychometric properties are summarised below as reported by their authors, followed by pilot reliability from the present researchers.

Cyberbullying Questionnaire (CBQ). The CBQ (Calvete et al., 2010) has two scales, one measuring cyberbullying perpetration and one measuring victimisation. It also includes a scale on the justification of cyberbullying, defined as the set of beliefs that aggression is appropriate for reasons such as revenge, restitution, amusement or deliberately causing harm. Responses on that scale run from 1 (never justified) to 6 (always justified). In the original validation, exploratory factor analysis yielded a single factor explaining 63.99% of the variance, with all loadings above .56 and an internal consistency of .85; reliability was .90 for perpetration and .79 for victimisation (Calvete et al., 2010). But cales were used.

Peer Relationship Scale. The Peer Relationship Scale (Aydoğdu, 2022) contains 29 items in four subscales (intimacy, popularity, trust and insightfulness), rated on a five-point scale from strongly disagree to completely agree. The scale was developed with 543 adolescents aged 11 to 18 in secondary and high schools. Aydoğdu reported good model fit (CFI = .97, RMSEA = .068, SRMR = .061), a total-score Cronbach's alpha of .93, split-half reliability of .85 and test-retest reliability of .82, with criterion validity shown through relationships with the Peer Support Scale and the Stirling Children's Well-being Scale.

Type A Behaviour Scale. Type A behaviour was measured with the 28-item scale developed by Omoluabi (1997). According to that source, items were drawn from a 21-item short version of the Jenkins Activity Survey and the 10-item Framingham Type A Scale; duplicated items were removed, reducing the pool from 31 to 28 items, and a uniform four-point response format was adopted. The scale has a reported Cronbach's alpha of .70. Scores are interpreted against Nigerian norms: scores above the norm indicate Type A behaviour and scores below it indicates Type B behaviour. In the present analysis the total score was treated as a continuous variable.

Pilot study. The researchers piloted the instruments with 60 students at Godfrey Okoye University, Enugu State, selected by availability sampling. Cronbach's alpha was .954 for the cyberbullying measure, .808 for the Type A scale, and .827 for the total Peer Relationship Scale (intimacy .741, popularity .775, trust .754 and insightfulness .582). The comparatively low coefficient for insightfulness is noted as a limitation.

Procedure

Participants for this study were drawn from three universities: Enugu State University of Science and Technology (ESUT), the University of Nigeria, Nsukka (UNN), and Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka (UNIZIK), using convenience and purposive sampling techniques. The institutions were selected through convenience sampling because they were readily accessible to the researcher. Thereafter, purposive sampling was used to recruit students who met the study criteria. A total of 193 participants were drawn from ESUT, 137 from UNN, and 93 from UNIZIK, giving a final sample of 423 undergraduate students. To facilitate data collection, the researcher engaged research assistants who were final year undergraduate and postgraduate students of the Psychology department in the selected universities. Their role was to assist in administering the questionnaires and retrieving the completed copies from the participants. Participation in the study was voluntary, and only full-time undergraduate students who gave their informed consent were included in the study. A total of 430 copies of the questionnaire were distributed across the three institutions. Of these, 427 copies were retrieved. Four questionnaires were subsequently excluded because three contained multiple

responses to several items and one was improperly completed. The remaining 423 properly completed questionnaires were therefore retained and used for the final data analysis.

Design and data analysis

A cross-sectional correlational design was adopted to examine whether peer relations, personality type and cyberbullying are related among undergraduates. Means and standard deviations were computed, and Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients were used to determine the direction and strength of relationships among the study variables, using IBM SPSS Statistics Version 25 (IBM Corp., 2017). Statistical significance was set at the .05 level (two-tailed).

Results

Table 1: Means, Standard Deviations and Intercorrelations among Study Variables

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Cyberbullying	26.42	12.05							
2. Type A behaviour	66.77	16.41	.172						
3. Intimacy	45.07	9.49	.008	.146					
4. Popularity	11.73	2.82	-.260*	-.041	.302*				
5. Insightfulness	17.62	4.13	-.203	-.091	.562**	.490**			
6. Trust	22.90	4.89	-.280*	-.156	.581**	.329*	.605**		
7. Age	20.48	1.97	-.014	.059	.093	.014	.052	.039	
8. Gender	1.75	0.44	-.405**	-.200	.262*	.083	.313*	.282*	.064

Note. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$ (two-tailed).

The first hypothesis was partly supported. Cyberbullying correlated negatively and significantly with two peer-relations dimensions, popularity ($r = -.260$, $p < .05$) and trust ($r = -.280$, $p < .05$); higher scores on these dimensions went with lower cyberbullying scores. Intimacy ($r = .008$) and insightfulness ($r = -.203$) were not significantly related to cyberbullying.

The second hypothesis was not supported. Type A behaviour was not significantly related to cyberbullying ($r = .172$), nor to any of the peer-relations dimensions.

Gender showed the strongest association with cyberbullying ($r = -.405$, $p < .01$). Gender was also positively related to intimacy ($r = .262$, $p < .05$), insightfulness ($r = .313$, $p < .05$) and trust ($r = .282$, $p < .05$). Among the peer-relations dimensions themselves, intimacy, insightfulness and trust were strongly interrelated ($r = .562$ to $.605$, $p < .01$), and popularity correlated moderately with all three ($r = .302$ to $.490$). Age was not significantly related to any variable.

Discussion

This study examined whether peer relations and Type A behaviour pattern were related to cyberbullying among Nigerian undergraduates. The findings provided partial support for the peer-relations hypothesis, while the Type A behaviour hypothesis was not supported.

Students who scored higher on popularity and trust tended to score lower on cyberbullying. This is consistent with Choice Theory (Glasser, 1999): where belonging and a sense of standing are met through trusted, well-regarded peer connections, aggression online has less to offer. The link between trust and lower cyberbullying also fits the wider point that supportive peer environments are associated with better adjustment (Juvonen et al., 2012; Li et al., 2011). The

results can be read the other way round, though. Students who bully online may be trusted less and liked less by their peers, so the direction of influence cannot be settled with correlational data. Intimacy and insightfulness were not significantly related to cyberbullying. The coefficient for insightfulness ($r = -.203$) was a small negative one that did not reach significance in this sample, and the pilot reliability for that subscale was low ($\alpha = .582$), so a larger study with a more reliable measure would be needed to say anything firm.

Type A behaviour was unrelated to cyberbullying. One possible reason is that the hostile and competitive features of Type A behaviour show up in face-to-face settings but do not translate directly into online aggression. Measurement may also play a part: the Type A scale has a modest reported reliability ($\alpha = .70$), and cyberbullying was measured by self-report, which may understate socially undesirable behaviour. The null result echoes two of the related studies with Nigerian undergraduates described earlier, in which dispositional or family-background predictors did not predict the outcome of interest (Chinawa et al., 2024a, 2024b), whereas mindfulness showed a small negative association with substance use (Ugwu et al., 2026). The studies differ in constructs, instruments and sample sizes, so the parallel is only suggestive. It does raise the possibility that, in this population, relational and skills-based variables carry more signal than fixed dispositions.

Gender had the largest correlation with cyberbullying. The sign of the coefficient depends on how gender was coded, and the sample was not evenly distributed across categories, so this finding should be examined further with a balanced sample report the numbers of male and female participants. Earlier work has also reported gender differences in cyberbullying (Wade & Beran, 2011, as cited in Husna et al., 2020).

Implications

For counsellors and student-affairs staff, the findings point toward strengthening the peer environment rather than screening for a personality type. Peer-led programmes, orientation activities and campus groups that build trust among students may be worth trying as ways of reducing cyberbullying. Interventions may also need to take gender into account. Clinicians and guidance counsellors can use these results to start conversations with students about how their standing among peers and their trust in them relate to how they behave online, bearing in mind that the evidence here shows association and not cause.

Limitations and directions for future research

Several limitations qualify these findings. The sample came from one private university and data were collected during an examination period, which may have reduced participation and limits generalisation. The sampling technique, with purposive selection within faculties, did not give every student an equal chance of selection. The design was cross-sectional and the measures were self-reported, so causal direction and social desirability remain open questions. The Peer Relationship Scale was developed with adolescents aged 11 to 18 rather than university students, and the insightfulness subscale showed low reliability in the pilot. Several demographic items, such as religious affiliation and parental working status, were left blank by many respondents and could not be analysed. Finally, many correlations were examined without adjustment for multiple comparisons. Future studies should draw participants from several institutions and from different times in the academic calendar, use a probability-based sampling design, and place demographic questions where respondents are unlikely to skip them. Longitudinal designs would help establish whether peer trust and popularity precede changes in cyberbullying or follow from it. Other dispositional and contextual variables, such as empathy, self-esteem, anonymity and online habits, could be tested alongside peer relations and personality. Validating the Peer Relationship Scale with undergraduate samples would also strengthen future work.

Conclusion

Among the undergraduates studied, popularity and trust in peer relationships were negatively associated with cyberbullying, whereas Type A behaviour was not. The findings suggest that supportive, trust-based peer environments deserve attention in efforts to reduce cyberbullying on university campuses. They should be replicated with larger, more varied samples before they are used to guide policy.

Declarations

Ethics approval and consent: Ethical principles governing research with human participants were observed throughout the study. Participation was voluntary, and participants were informed about the purpose of the study before completing the questionnaires. Informed consent was obtained from the participants, and confidentiality and anonymity of their responses were maintained throughout the study. No personally identifying information was required for the analysis.

Conflict of interest: The authors declare that there was no conflict of interest that could have influenced the conduct of the study, the analysis of the data, or the reporting of the findings.

Data availability: The data generated and analysed during this study are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request, subject to the protection of participants' privacy and confidentiality.

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