

The Impact of Cyber Bullying on the Youth: The Ghanaian Perspective

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ABSTRACT

Recently, cyberbullying, a form of bullying has emerged as a result of technological advancement and the ubiquity of mobile devices. Cyberbullying has become a major issue in contemporary times because of its adverse effect on mainly adolescent students. This study aims to analyze the impact of cyberbullying on the youth in Ghana. Specifically, the study sought to find out if there exists a relationship between gender, age, and level of education with cyberbullying. A regression analysis was used to determine if there exists any relationship between the independent variables and cyberbullying. The study adopts a quantitative approach, using a questionnaire to elicit views from respondents. The sample was chosen using a multi-stage sampling approach that included purposive, simple random, and snowball sampling techniques. Six Senior High Schools (SHS) in Ghana's Greater Accra and Central Regions provided a total of 420 responses. The findings revealed, among other things, that there is no significant relationship between gender and cyberbullying, there is a significant relationship between age and cyberbullying and there is a significant relationship between the level of education and cyberbullying.

General Terms

Cyberbullying, Senior High School, Social media, Ghana

Keywords

Cyberbullying, Senior High School, Social media

1. INTRODUCTION

The fight against bullying and infringing on children's rights has recently become a major concern for all well-meaning individuals, governments, and child rights organizations around the world [1]. Based on the pervasiveness of child abuse and bullying, proponents of human rights, including the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Protocols, and guided by the United Nations study on violence against children, have mounted a strong case worldwide to raise awareness and understanding of children's exposure to violence, renewed commitments to secure their safety and protection, and domestic implementation efforts to marshal support for prevention [2]. Nonetheless, the exponential rise of the internet and its associated social media portals has made the situation in protecting minors from sexual violence, abuse, and bullying that occurs online much more complicated and puzzling[3]. Cyberbullying, according to Kowalski, Limber, and Agatston[4] occurs when an individual intentionally and consistently utilizes digital technology to harass, humiliate, embarrass, torment, threaten, pick on, or intimidate another person. Cyberbullying can take many forms, including text messages, emails, and online games, as well as social media sites such as Facebook, YouTube, Tumblr, Snapchat, Instagram, TikTok, etc. Because of the

general unparalleled problems and pedagogical challenges it offers for schools, educators, parents, policymakers, and legal systems, cyberbullying among youngsters has risen to the top of public policy agendas in many nations[5]. Here are a few of the most pressing concerns: Traditional types of bullying are extended to online platforms, where abusers can hide behind screen aliases and appear anonymous. As a result, children who have been targeted online return to school, unsure of which of their peers may be the culprits. Again the Internet allows a limitless number of people to participate on social networking platforms like Facebook and YouTube, enabling onlookers and cyber-voyeurs to post harsh insults, make explicit threats, spread false rumors, and publish jokes and embarrassing videotapes[6]. Child maltreatment, especially bullying, is one of the key causes of human society's regress[7]. Researchers, educators, parents, and communities are grappling with how adolescents, who are generally thought to be decent and compassionate people, behave in ways that condone and maintain bullying, with a significant number of kids engaging in bullying directly or failing to do anything to stop it[8]. Willard [9] classified cyber bullying into the following categories: (a) 'Flaming,' which involves publishing angry, unpleasant, or vulgar comments about someone in an online community, via email, or through other electronic methods. (b) 'Online harassment,' which refers to the sending of offensive communications repeatedly by email, social media, or other electronic methods. (c) 'Cyberstalking,' which is defined as recurrent online harassment, such as threats, intimidation, or communications, to stalk the victim. (d) 'Denigration' (put-downs), which involves sending or posting harsh or hateful words about the victim. (e) 'Masquerading' is when someone pretends to be someone else and sends or posts information that makes the victim appear bad. (f) 'Outing' is the act of sharing or posting information about a victim that is sensitive, private, or embarrassing. (g) When a person is singled out of an online group, this is referred to as "exclusion." According to Snyder, De Brey, and Dillow[10] approximately one-fifth of all kids (21%) report being harassed at some point in their schooling, affecting over 5 million children each year. Bullied children are more likely to develop depression, anxiety, sleep problems, poor academic performance, and eventually drop out of school[11]. Patchinand Hinduja[12]found that roughly 34% of students have experienced cyberbullying at some point in their lives and that over 60% of students who have experienced cyberbullying said it has had a significant impact on their ability to learn and feel safe at school. According to Anderson and Jiang[13], 59 percent of American teenagers have been bullied or harassed online, and over 90% believe it is a big issue for kids their age. Children all over the world are becoming increasingly technologically savvy, as communication and learning are now primarily accomplished through the use of portable devices such as cell phones and

other hand-held devices that were previously not part of a child's daily routine [14]. In recent years, news coverage and study have focused on the spread and easy access to the internet and other technologies among children. Recent reports of technology misuse have also raised concerns among educators, governments, and parents trying to warn people about the threats inherent in cyberspace [15]. This study aims to investigate the impact of cyberbullying on adolescent students in urban areas in Ghana.

1.1 Problem Statement

van Tiel [16] analyzed survey findings of adults in 28 countries and showed that a growing number of parents have children who have been victims of some form of cyberbullying.

A total of 20,793 interviews were conducted between March 23 and April 6, 2018, among adults aged between 18 and 64 in Canada and the US, and adults aged between 16 and 64 in all other countries. In both countries, parents were certain their children have not been cyberbullied in any form. On the contrary, Indian parents remained among the most certain that their children had been cyberbullied at least once, a number that only increased between 2011 and 2018. Parents in Europe appear to be either becoming more conscious of their children's experiences with cyberbullying or their children are increasingly facing such attacks online.[17]. The chronicle of reports discussed, from the distribution of information about the victim online for slander to sexually evocative annotations and the sharing of images of children traumatize them. The ever-growing online actors increase and magnify the level of humiliation experienced during cyberbullying compared to traditional bullying. Upsetting posts, expressive brawls, and nervousness over peer pressure are rising issues for today's youth to contend with.

With the foregoing discussions about the negative impact of cyberbullying on children globally, and the strategies adopted by governments to nib the phenomenon in the bud, it appears there is little in terms of research in developing countries such as Ghana. To the best of my knowledge, studies in cyberbullying have been comparatively low in Ghana in the past, probably because of the delay in technological advancement. Recently, however, because the youth in developing countries are becoming technologically savvy, due to their reliance and interest in social media activities, there has been an urgent interest to investigate their activities online. For example, Bariham, et al. [18] stated that there were 15.70 million internet users in Ghana in January 2021 with 80% representing the youth. They also opined that the number of internet users in Ghana increased by 943 thousand (+6.4%) between 2020 and 2021. Finally, they showed that internet penetration in Ghana stood at 50.0% in January 2021. The information uncovered in this study might be beneficial in addressing cyberbullying behavior among children of school-going age and its impacts on the youth in urban areas in Ghana.

This study aims to increase our limited knowledge on cyberbullying by investigating cyberbullying rates, victimization rates among children in senior high schools. My emphasis is on high school students because research has indicated that a peak for bullying and cyberbullying occurs in ages 13 to 15 [19]. Specifically, I am investigating the influence of gender, age, and level of education and their relationships to cyberbullying. The inferences of this study may include information for developing effective cyberbullying interventions.

My research questions are as follows:

Q1. What are the rates of internet usage by youth in schools?

Q2. What are the rates of cyberbullying?

Q3. H1. Is there a relationship between gender and cyberbullying?

Q4. H2. Is there a relationship between age and cyberbullying?

Q5. H3. Is there a relationship between the level of education and cyberbullying?

1.2 Purpose of study

The amount of study on cyberbullying is low, particularly with samples from Ghana. The goal of this study was to find out how common cyberbullying is among Ghanaian youth and how it affects them. This study will provide details on the nature of cyberbullying, as well as proof of students' exposure to and participation in these behaviors in Ghana. It will also examine the types of harassing conduct that students are exposed to and engage in on the internet and through cell phones, as well as teenagers' coping methods in response to these harassing behaviors.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

In academic contexts, research shows that social media platforms are a major source of information, communication, and collaborative learning. Nonetheless, these techniques have certain negative consequences when it comes to long-term bullying in cyberspace. Cyberbullying is described as the persistent or long-term abuse, insult, or threat of those who are weaker and unable to defend themselves via the Internet or other communication means [20, 21], [22, 23]. Bullies frequently use instant messaging, emails, and social networking sites to taunt, tease, harass, and intimidate their victims[24]. The negative impacts of cyberbullying on student academic performance cannot be overstated, as evidenced by research[25-27]. Studies reveal that victims of online bullying feel destructive, helpless, and powerless[28] and that they may become irritated and engage in criminal activity as a result. According to research, students who are cyberbullied tend to have low academic accomplishment and are less focused on their academics [29].

Previously, children could withdraw to the protection of their homes to avoid bullying events. The same cannot be said, unfortunately, for cyberbullying. While school systems have made significant progress in developing and executing crisis response plans and zero-tolerance policies, according to McQuadee et al.[30], it is critical to continue to assess the broader landscape to see if further concerns about adolescent safety should be addressed. It's becoming increasingly clear that the internet has introduced a new threat to student safety to schools: cyberbullying[31]. Smart devices' pervasiveness and technological advancements have introduced an unanticipated hazard to adolescents: the cyberbully. While the majority of cyberbullying occurs off-campus, the aftereffects of bullying can be seen in school[32]. The questions of how and to what extent schools should deal with cyberbullies are difficult to address.

For example, Ybarra, Boyd, Korchmaros, and Oppenheim [33] discovered that some intrinsic aspects of modern communication platforms, such as persistence, searchability, replicability, and an invisible audience, have contributed greatly to adolescents' cruelty for cyberbullying:

Persistence: Online speech is persistent in the sense that networked communications are preserved indefinitely and exist even when they are no longer visible. **Searchability-** Individual identities are preserved and recorded, so everyone, even if they don't know the person, has the opportunity to look for them. **Replicability-Copying and pasting someone's words**

from one site to another is as simple as copying and pasting. Invisible audience-Teens can't tell who's with them in a virtual context, so they can't be confident the person they're talking to is who they say they are. The possible consequences of cyberbullying, as well as elements that may moderate its effects, is one key problem that has drawn a huge number of scholars into cyberbullying research. According to Extremera[34], cyberbullying can have negative consequences for adolescents, including suicidal intentions. According to a study conducted by Livingstone, Kroeger, Stoilova, and Yu[1], about 2,000 young people aged 9 to 17 in Ghana indicated that they know, directly or indirectly, that about 3 out of 10 youth have ever experienced something that has upset them while online (during their lifetime), with about 2 out of 10 reporting they have been treated in a harmful or unfavorable manner over the internet. Sam, Bruce, Agyemang, Amponsah, and Arkorful[35] conducted a study on cyberbullying with 844 respondents taken from students at the elementary, secondary, and university levels. There were 140 JHS students, 224 SHS students, and 476 university students among the responders, while four others did not specify their educational level. Cyberbullying was shown to be widespread among the participants in the study. Receiving a threatening text message is the most common kind of cyberbullying. Over two-thirds (73.2%) of all respondents had received at least one of these messages, with 83 percent of university students have encountered it at least once. Nasty emails were the least common kind of cyberbullying, with 31.3 percent of respondents experiencing it at least once. In Ghana's universities, cyberbullying is highly frequent, with students being discriminated against and bullied depending on what they stand for or represent. Just as social media helps

individuals from all over the world to connect and engage, it also allows terrorists and atrocities to flourish. Cyberbullying has been more common in Ghanaian institutions in recent years, resulting in suicide and deaths. For example, one can be tracked down and assassinated, or attacked because of their affiliations on social media[36].

3. METHODOLOGY

The study's major goal was to look at the prevalence and consequences of cyberbullying among Ghanaian youngsters. The study took a quantitative approach, with respondents' opinions elicited through a questionnaire. The sample was chosen using a multi-stage sampling approach that included purposive, simple random, and snowball sampling techniques. Six senior high schools in Ghana's Greater Accra and Central Regions provided a total of 420 responses. From each region, three senior high schools were chosen. The regions were chosen based on the number of senior high schools in each. Bullies, victims of bullies, and bystanders in bullying were the three types of respondents used. The results of the survey were analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Demographic Analysis

According to Hauser [37], as cited by Taeuber, et al. [38], demography is the study of population numbers, territorial distribution, and composition, as well as changes in these characteristics, such as natality, mortality, territorial movement (migration), and social mobility (change of status).

Table 1 Demographics

VARIABLES	RESPONSES	PERCENTAGES
Gender	Male	46
	Female	54
Age	13-15years	7.9
	16-18years	50.8
	Above 18years	41.6
Class	SHS1	7.9
	SHS2	22.2
	SHS3	69.8

Source: Field Work (2021)

Table 1 shows that males account for 46% of the responses, while females account for 54%. The fact that the majority of the respondents were females can be deduced from the pattern. 7.9% of respondents were between the ages of 13 and 15, 50.8 percent were between the ages of 16 and 18, and 41.6 percent were over the age of 18. According to the trend, the bulk of the respondents were between the ages of 16 and 18. 7.9% of the respondents were in SHS1, 22.2 percent in SHS2, and 69.8 percent in SHS3, according to the respondents' classes.

4.2 Reliability Test

The questionnaire's reliability was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha. Cronbach's alpha, according to Taber (2018), is a digit between 0 and 1 that represents the internal consistency of a test or scale. It's regarded as satisfactory if the dependability coefficient is 0.7 or higher. Our instrument has a Cronbach alpha of 0.908, indicating that it is dependable[39].

Table 2 Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.803	39

Source: Field Work (2021)

4.3 Cyberbullying

4.3.1 Awareness

Table 3 showed that 31.7% of the students rarely use the internet whereas 68.3% are all yson the internet. In respect of being bullied, a greater portion (55.5%) said they haven't been bullied and 44.5% said they have been bullied.

With regards to awareness of cyberbullying, the majority of the respondents know about cyberbullying (72.4%) and 27.6% are not aware of cyberbullying.

Table 3 Cyberbullying

VARIABLES	RESPONSES	PERCENTAGES
How often do you use the internet	Seldom	31.7
	Always	68.3
Have you been bullied	No	55.5
	Yes	44.5
Do you know about cyberbullying	No	27.6
	Yes	72.4

Source: Field Work (2021)

Table 4 Cyberbullying Frequencies

		Responses		Percent of Cases
		N	Percent	
Cyberbullying	when an individual bullies another individual on the internet	289	32.9%	69.8%
	when a person sendscruel text messages or images to another individual	264	30.1%	63.8%
	when there is name-calling online	214	24.4%	51.7%
	when you impersonateanother person online	111	12.6%	26.8%
Total		878	100.0%	212.1%

Source: Field Work (2021)

In table 4, respondents were asked about their knowledge of what cyberbullying is? The majority of the students (32.9%) said cyberbullying is when someone bullies another student on the internet; 30.1% thought that it is when you send mean text messages or pictures to another student, 24.4% said when you call others names online and 12.6% thinks cyberbullying is when you impersonate another person online.

4.3.2 Incidence of Cyberbullying

On the incidence of cyberbullying, most of the respondents have not been cyberbullied and 32.9% have been cyberbullied. It was also observed that most of those bullied

did not report the incidence, with the excuse that they were scared and didn't want to be seen as a *fearoo* to wit a weakling. Others said they just ignore the whole experience. A few also claim they did not know who to report the incidence. Surprisingly others saw the whole cyber bullying experience asa social media norm. Some victims of cyberbullying we spoke to said they reported such cases to their parents, friends, and the police.

Also,the majority of the respondents (50.0%) were of the view that cyberbullying occurs all the time, 25.7% said it happens too often but not all the time, 19.5% said it happens sometimes and 4.3% opines cyberbullying never occurs.

Table 5 Reporting Cyberbullying

VARIABLES	RESPONSES	PERCENTAGES
Have you been cyberbullied	No	67.1
	Yes	32.9
Did you report to anyone?	No	19.3
	Yes	17.9
	Not Applicable	62.8
How frequent, in your opiniondoes cyberbully occurs	Always	50.5
	Often but not always	25.7
	Seldom	19.5
	Never	4.3

Source: Field Work (2021)

Table 6 Opinions on Cyberbullying Frequencies

		Responses		Percent of Cases
		N	Percent	
Cyberbullying	I am oblivious to what cyberbullying is	67	6.7%	16.0%
	I don't think Cyberbullying is anything serious	43	4.3%	10.2%

	My friends have been cyberbullied in the past	234	23.4%	55.7%
	There have been reports of cyberbullying in my school	108	10.8%	25.7%
	I have cyberbullied others in the past	30	3.0%	7.1%
	I had a verbal brawl with users online, but don't regard it as cyberbullying	67	6.7%	16.0%
	A close friend bullied me online	92	9.2%	21.9%
	Someone steal my login credentials and pretend to be me	83	8.3%	19.8%
	Someone took a joke I sent them as cyberbullying	101	10.1%	24.0%
	My friends and I have cyberbullied someone just for fun	37	3.7%	8.8%
	I have seen mean messages directed at me online, but I don't regard such messages as cyberbullying	138	13.8%	32.9%
Total		1000	100.0%	238.1%

Source: Field Work (2021)

Table 6 indicates a multiple response question i.e. respondents were to tick all answers that apply. The majority of the respondents indicated that their friends have been cyberbullied (23.4%), 13.8% said others have said mean things to or about them online but they didn't consider it as cyberbullying, 10.8% said they have had a cyberbullying incidence in their school, 10.1% of the respondents said they sent a joke to someone but it was viewed as cyberbullying. Also, 9.2% of the respondents said they have been cyberbullied by close friends, 8.3% opined that people have stolen their password/cellphone and pretended to be them, an equal number of respondents (6.7%) said they don't know about cyberbullying and they have said nasty things to other people online but does not consider it as cyberbullying, 4.3% sees cyberbullying as nothing, 3.7% said they have bullied someone with their friends just for fun and 3% of the respondents said that they have bullied others.

Table 7 Effects of Cyberbullying on Students

Effects	Percentage
Esteem	51
Affects Mental health (anxiety, depression, feelings of alienation, reduced concentration, suicidal thoughts)	47.4
Interrupts sleep pattern	1.7

Source: Field Work (2021)

With regards to the effects of cyberbullying on students, 51% said it causes low self-esteem, 47.4% said it affects mental health (anxiety, depression, feelings of alienation, reduced concentration, suicidal thoughts) and 1.7% said it interrupts

sleep patterns. Students with low self-esteem might get distracted with their studies.

4.3.4 Laws on Cyberbullying

Respondents were allowed to make a law if it was in their power, the majority (17.8%) of the respondents said they would make cyberbullying illegal, 17.3% said schools have to teach students about cyberbullying, 14.7% said they would institute a youth helpline, for students(victims) to go for help, 13.8% suggested that schools should counsel parents on how to help their children who are cyberbullied to come out from it, 13.4% said schools have to institute counseling and psychological sessions for students who have been cyberbullied, 12.3% of the respondents said workshops, seminars and conferences must be held for young people to solve the cyberbullying problem and 10.8% suggested the establishment of a cyberbullying police unit.

Table 8 Laws on cyberbullying

		Responses		Percent of Cases
		N	Percent	
Laws on Cyberbullying ^a	Cyberbullying should be prohibited	211	17.8%	51.7%
	Schools should set up counseling sessions for students who were cyberbullied	159	13.4%	39.0%
	There should be a unit in the Ghana police service to investigate cyberbullying	128	10.8%	31.4%
	Cyberbullying should be taught in Schools	205	17.3%	50.2%
	Schools should train parents on how to help their children who are victims of cyberbullying	164	13.8%	40.2%
	There should be a helpline for victims of cyberbullying	175	14.7%	42.9%
	There should be conferences for young people to help mitigate the effect of cyberbullying	146	12.3%	35.8%
Total		1188	100.0%	291.2%

a. Dichotomy group tabulated at value 1.

Source: Field Work (2021)

Suggestions to Parents

Respondents were asked what they would want adults (parents, guardians, or caregivers) to know. Some respondents said they would want them to be in the know of the dire consequences of cyberbullying on the victims, especially the danger it poses to their mental health. Other respondents were of the view that parents should give listening ears to their children. Adults should educate their wards on cyberbullying and make sure their wards don't also partake in it and should also pay attention to what their wards do on social media.

4.4 Relationship

4.4.1 Regression

This study sought to find out if there was a relationship between gender, age, and level of education with cyberbullying. A regression analysis was used to determine if there was a relationship.

This table generated the specific regression equation as
CYBER = 0.084GEN - 0.255AG + 0.148CLAS

Table 9 Model Coefficients

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	
	B	Std. Error	Beta			
1	(Constant)	.546	.073		7.442	.000
	Gender of Respondents	.051	.029	.084	1.752	.081
	Age of Respondents	-.117	.026	-.255	-4.507	.000
	Class of Respondents	.066	.025	.148	2.613	.009

a. Dependent Variable: Cyberbullying

Source: Field Work (2021)

The gender regression coefficient (B1) = 0.084 indicates that a change in gender (increase by one) will result in a 0.084 rise in cyberbullying. The null hypothesis must be accepted because a P value of 0.081, which is more than the 0.05 level of significance, indicates that there is insufficient statistical proof that an increase in gender will increase cyberbullying and vice versa.

Because the regression coefficient for age (B2) = 0.255, a one-year increase in age reduces cyberbullying by 0.255. The null hypothesis was rejected because a P value of 0.000, which is less than the 0.05 level of significance, indicates that

there is adequate statistical proof that an increase in age will decrease cyberbullying and vice versa.

The regression coefficient for class (B2) = 0.148 indicates that a one-level increase in education will increase cyberbullying by 14.8%, and the P-value of 0.009, which is less than the 0.05 level of significance, indicates that there is sufficient statistical proof that an increase in education will increase cyberbullying and vice versa, rejecting the null hypothesis.

5. CONCLUSION

The study sought to find out if there exists a relationship between gender, age, and level of education with

cyberbullying. A regression analysis was used to determine if there exists any relationship between the independent variables (age, gender, and level of education) and cyberbullying. The results showed among other things that, there is no significant relationship between gender and cyberbullying, there is a significant relationship between age and cyberbullying and there is a significant relationship between the level of education and cyberbullying. The study also showed that the majority of SHS students are always on the internet with the females dominating. It is instructive to also note that, majority of the respondents are aware of the threat of cyberbullying on the internet. Schools, families, students, and society should all work together to combat cyberbullying. Because cyberbullying takes place outside of school, schools may send such cases to parents, alleging that they lack legal power. Cyberbullying, on the other hand, may have its origins in the classroom or vice versa, even if the incidents appear to begin on school premises. This involves the development of comprehensive anti-cyberbullying activities in schools, such as policies and effective instructional programs for students. Bullying among children and young people does not cease when the school bell sounds in today's digital era. However, it appears that protective measures have improved at a considerably slower rate than the technology used to perpetrate cyberbullying. Schools and politicians must give equal attention to cyberbullying and conventional bullying, as well as the interaction between the two. While there are several initiatives aimed at raising awareness about cyberbullying, Ghanaian teenagers may probably benefit from a more intensive and long-term campaign to educate parents on how to safeguard their children. It will be interesting in the future to study the dynamics of cyberbullying of students in Institutions of Higher Learning in Ghana.

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