

**CYBERBULLYING AND MENTAL HEALTH AMONG STUDENTS IN UNIVERSITY
OF BENIN.**

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FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY AND ANTHOPOLOGY

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**A RESEARCH PROJECT SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF
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CERTIFICATION

This is to certify that this project was carried out by **CHIEMEKWELE RITA** with matriculation number **SSC2010572**, in the Department of Sociology and Anthropology, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Benin. Benin City.

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DEDICATION

This project is dedicated to God almighty for his unending love and support throughout my university days.

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I express my profound gratitude to God Almighty for guiding me throughout this academic journey. My Appreciation goes to my project supervisor for her exceptional guidance and patience. Special thanks goes to my parents, Mr. and Mrs. **CHIEMEKWELE**, for their great love, encouragement and support.

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the Cyberbullying And Mental Health Among Students In University Of Benin. A total of 140 respondents participated in the study, providing insights into their perception on cyber bullying and mental health, and the relationship between the two. This study employed a descriptive survey research design, The data for this study was collected by using the questionnaires, The findings indicate that The mental health impact of cyberbullying was also significant, with anxiety being the most common psychological consequence, followed by depression and stress. Many students also reported low self-esteem and a sense of social isolation. These findings underscore the severe consequences of cyberbullying, affecting students' mental well-being and overall academic performance. The study concluded that The low awareness of available support systems, along with their perceived ineffectiveness, highlights a gap in addressing the needs of students who are victims of cyberbullying.

Keywords: cyber-bully, Mental health, Anxiety, Anonymity.

CHAPTER 1

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

1.1 INTRODUCTION

The increased availability of the internet has made it possible for people worldwide to communicate and exchange ideas almost instantly. Most online services have been beneficial (e.g., online banking, shopping, and education), but some unforeseen negative impacts have also emerged in the form of various cybercrimes, such as hacking, online fraud, and the focus of this research—cyberbullying. While many students use technology properly, some have used it inappropriately by hurting, humiliating, embarrassing, and personally assaulting others (Hinduja & Patchin, 2012; Kowalski, 2008; Hinduja & Patchin, 2010). This research focuses on cyberbullying among the University of Benin Students to find the genders, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and year in school (student status), that are most affected by cyberbullying, how cyberbullies target their victims, platforms where cyberbullying mostly occurred, and why they did or did not report the issue to law enforcement, family, and school administration.

Cyberbullying is described as "willful and repeated harm inflicted through the use of computers, cell phones, and other electronic devices" (Hinduja & Patchin, 2009; Hinduja & Patchin, 2012, p.7). Cyberbullying also refers to "an aggressive, intentional act carried out by a group or individual, using electronic forms of contact, repeatedly and over time against a victim who cannot easily defend him or herself" (Smith et al., 2008, p. 376). According to research by Crosslin & Golman (2014), focusing on University students found that cyberbullying is an issue that is pervasive and has serious repercussions for those who are involved. According to Shariff (2008), cyberbullying includes sending pictures and videos to other people, encouraging the

person to share their personal information, and/or sending sexually explicit pictures and videos via

digital platforms like websites, instant messaging, blogs, mobile phones, email, or online personal profiles. It also includes threatening, defaming, and humiliating other people. Our culture is experiencing an increase in cyberbullying because of technological improvements (Farley, et al., 2021). While cyberbullying has been defined as repeated, unwanted harassment using digital technologies (Adams & Lawrence, 2011, Kraft & Wang, 2010), there are several other definitions that have been discussed in the literature that center on threats of physical harm to online aggression to the use of technology such as web cams (Sabella, et al., 2013).

Cyberbullying has been a growing concern worldwide, with various studies highlighting its prevalence and impact. In the United States, a significant percentage of teens report experiencing cyberbullying, with detrimental effects on their mental health, including increased anxiety, depression, and in severe cases, suicidal ideation (Kowalski, Giumetti, Schroeder & Lattanner 2014). In Europe, countries like the United Kingdom have also reported rising cases of social media bullying, prompting legislative actions and school-based interventions to curb its spread (Smith, Mahdavi, Carvalho, Fisher, Russell, and Tippett 2008).

The University of Benin, serves as a microcosm for understanding the broader impact of Cyberbullying on students' mental health within the country. University students are at a critical developmental stage where peer acceptance and social interaction play crucial roles in their personal and academic lives. These issues, along with the negative emotional and physical repercussions of cyberbullying, may influence how people engage with one another in social settings (Anderson & Sturm, 2007). Cyberbullying may be perceived as more harmful since the attacks can be more severe, frequent, cunning, and allegedly difficult to stop than

"offline" (i.e., traditional or schoolyard) bullying (Hinduja & Patchin, 2009). In addition to having a slightly different appearance and experience from typical bullying, cyberbullying also poses certain additional difficulties for adults who engage with children, such as parents, teachers, and other adults.

Social media platforms like WhatsApp, commonly used by students at the University of Benin, has the ability to send anonymous messages within groups. While this feature is intended to promote candid and open communication, it has, unfortunately, become a tool for some students to engage in harmful behaviors. According to Byers & Cerulli (2021), Cyberbullying is prevalent on University campuses, but is rarely discussed since many students reject the problem and it is often kept from school officials. Cyberbullies are using various online platforms to particularly target their victims as technology develops and new online and social media platforms are formed. Research shows that those who have been cyberbullied or who have been the victims of cyberbullying in high school are more likely to become victims or bullies in University (Beran et al., 2012; Kraft & Wang, 2010; Selkie et al., 2015; Slonje & Smith, 2008).

The compulsive use of the Internet in a manner that leads to conflicts in important aspects of life and difficulty in establishing limitation on its use is referred to as problematic Internet use (Kim & Davis, 2009). Individuals with this tendency frequently overuse the Internet, want to increase usage time, and thus face negative consequences. Social isolation, academic failure, and physical and mental fatigue are a few examples of such outcomes (Block, 2008). The Internet provides facilities in daily life, presents opportunities for communication, and is easily accessible, which thus increases time spent online, which is effective in making users dependent on the Internet. Such conveniences and social life render university students one of the groups most at risk to

Internet addiction (Ceyhan, 2010). In the literature, the prevalence of problematic internet use varies between 1% and 55% (Sayeed et al., 2021).

According to a study by Schenk & Fremouw (2012), University cybervictims' psychological states were marked by interpersonal sensitivity, depression, aggression, and psychotic behaviors as compared to controls. Cybervictims exhibited a behavioral shift in which they lost confidence in people and avoided settings (Crosslin & Crosslin, 2014; Schenk & Fremouw, 2012). Cyberbullies themselves also demonstrated psychological effects because of the victimization, so it was not only the cyber victims who were affected. It is interesting to note that, in contrast to bullying, cyberbullies reported higher levels of hostility, violence, and drug offences while exhibiting many of the same symptoms as victims (Schenk, et.al, 2013).

To address this growing concern, Nigeria has introduced cyber laws, dubbed the Cybercrimes Act, aimed at combating these unlawful activities (Uba, 2021). The enactment of the Nigerian Cybercrime Act of 2015 addresses various online criminal acts, including child pornography, cyberstalking, and cyberterrorism. Additionally, the introduction of protection from Internet falsehoods, manipulations, and other related matters bills aims to criminalize the promotion of false information on social media (Olonode, 2021).

This study aims at understanding the dynamics of social media bullying within the University of Benin as it is crucial for developing effective strategies to combat it. By exploring the unique challenges faced by students in this context, this study aims to contribute to the broader discourse on cyberbullying and mental health, providing insights that could lead to more targeted interventions and support systems for affected individuals.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Cyberbullying has emerged as a significant concern in contemporary society, particularly within the university setting. The pervasive use of digital technologies among students facilitates cyberbullying behaviors, leading to detrimental impacts on their mental health. This study aims to investigate the prevalence and nature of cyberbullying among students at the University of Benin, examining the specific forms it takes, the motivations behind these acts, and the resulting psychological consequences on victims. Furthermore, the research will explore the role of institutional policies and interventions in addressing cyberbullying and promoting positive mental health outcomes for students. The widespread use of digital technology has made many users experience cyberbullying either as victims or perpetrators (Adediran 2021).

A crucial aspect of this research will involve assessing the effectiveness of current institutional policies and interventions in addressing cyberbullying and promoting positive mental health outcomes for students. This includes evaluating the awareness and accessibility of support services, the implementation of educational programs on cyberbullying prevention, and the enforcement of disciplinary measures against perpetrators. Studies noted the damaging effect of problematic internet use on mental health (Lam, 2014) and academic performance of youngs (Khan et al., 2016).

The study will investigate the prevalence of cyberbullying among students at the University of Benin, examining the various forms it manifests, such as online harassment, threats, social exclusion, and the dissemination of harmful content. It will explore the underlying motivations driving these acts, including factors like social dynamics, peer pressure, and individual psychological characteristics. Furthermore, the research will meticulously examine the

psychological consequences of cyberbullying on victims, including the development of anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, trauma, and potential impacts on academic performance.

1.3 Research Questions

The following are the questions this study seeks to provide answers to:

1. How prevalent is social media bullying among students at the University of Benin?
2. What specific forms does social media bullying take on platforms like WhatsApp within the University of Benin?
3. How does the anonymity feature of social media platforms influence the nature and intensity of bullying among university students?
4. What are the immediate and long-term mental health effects of social media bullying on students at the University of Benin?
5. How effective are existing measures and support systems in addressing social media bullying and its impact on students' mental health at the University of Benin?

1.4 Research Objectives

The main objective of this study is to examine the impact of social media bullying on the mental health of students at the University of Benin. However, the following are the specific objectives of this study:

1. To assess the prevalence of social media bullying among students at the University of Benin.
2. To identify the specific forms of social media bullying that occur on platforms like WhatsApp within the University of Benin.
3. To explore how the anonymity feature of social media platforms contributes to the nature and intensity of bullying among university students.

4. To evaluate the immediate and long-term mental health effects of social media bullying on students at the University of Benin.
5. To analyze the effectiveness of existing measures and support systems in addressing social media bullying and its impact on students' mental health at the University of Benin.

1.5 Significance of the Study

This study enhances the understanding of social media bullying within the University of Benin, distinguishing it from traditional forms of bullying. The research offers insights to improve targeted mental health interventions for students affected by social media bullying. Findings will guide university administrators in creating more effective policies and support systems to combat social media bullying. The study raises awareness about the severe consequences of social media bullying, promoting empathy and responsible online behavior. It contributes valuable context-specific data to global research on cyberbullying, particularly within the African educational setting.

1.6 Definition of terms

Social Media Bullying (Cyberbullying): Social media bullying, or cyberbullying, involves using digital platforms to harass or intimidate others through posts, messages, or images.

Mental Health: Mental health encompasses emotional, psychological, and social well-being, affecting how individuals think, feel, and act.

Anonymity: Anonymity in social media allows users to interact or post without revealing their true identity.

Prevalence: Prevalence refers to how often social media bullying occurs within a specific group, such as university students.

Support Systems: Support systems are resources and services designed to help students manage the effects of social media bullying, including counseling, peer support, and anti-bullying policies.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Definition and conceptualization of cyberbullying

Cyberbullying is a complex phenomenon with varying definitions. It is commonly described as an aggressive and intentional act carried out through electronic means, targeting a victim repeatedly over time. The use of the internet, cell phones, or other devices to send text or images with the intention of hurting or embarrassing someone is also recognized as cyberbullying. In Nigeria, cyberbullying is defined as the use of technology to send harmful or embarrassing content (Xu & Trzaskawka, 2021). Cyberbullying encompasses various behaviours, including persistent harassment through emails or texts despite the recipient's request for no further contact. It can also involve public actions such as threats, defamation, ridicule in online forums, hacking or vandalizing online content about a person, spreading false statements to discredit or humiliate the target, spreading rumors with the intention of inciting hatred, and disclosing personal information to defame or humiliate victims of crime (Ifeoma, 2022).

The term cyber stalking is sometimes used interchangeably with cyberbullying, referring to conduct directed at causing fear in a specific person. While there are shared elements such as intent and repetition, scholars have not reached a consensus on the defining properties of cyberbullying. Additional features include power imbalance, direct and indirect forms of cyberbullying, the victim's perception, and harm inflicted. Cyberbullying, a detrimental consequence of technological advancement, takes place primarily on online platforms, particularly social media. The absence of inhibitions in the online environment allows for rapid and widespread victimization (Adediran, 2021).

Cyberbullying refers to the use of technology to harass, hurt, embarrass, humiliate, and intimidate others. It must incorporate the essential elements of bullying, including being intractable, recurring, causing harm perceived by the target, and being perpetrated via computers, phones, or other electronic devices. Cyberbullying primarily occurs among young people, but when adults are involved, it may be categorized as cyber-harassment or cyberstalking (Irahor & Osebor, 2022).

The definitions provide a comprehensive understanding of cyberbullying, highlighting its aggressive and intentional nature through electronic means. They recognize the use of technology such as the Internet and electronic devices to harm or embarrass others as a key aspect of cyberbullying. These definitions do not explicitly address the role of anonymity in cyberbullying, which can contribute to the harmful and widespread nature of this behaviour. Anonymity allows perpetrators to act without fear of consequences and may impact the power dynamics between the bully and the victim. However, these definitions provide insights into the prevalence of cyberbullying using technological tools, including social media.

For this study, I will focus on Chicoş (2022) definition of cyberbullying, which states that the term cyberbullying was coined by Bill Belsey, who argued that cyberbullying involves the use of information and communication technologies to support deliberate, repeated, and hostile behavior by an individual or group that is intended to harm others. Another definition of cyberbullying, according to Chicoş (2022), refers to various forms of psychological abuse committed through acts of harassment transmitted through information and communication technologies, such as the Internet, mobile phones, or wireless or Bluetooth networks. These acts of violence are committed by threatening, intimidating, or insulting victims and are repetitive and can be committed by both individuals and groups of people. According to Chicoş (2022), a

person who experiences harm to their physical or mental health because of illegal online activities, such as violence, harassment, intimidation, or exposure to pornographic material, is said to be a victim of cyberbullying. However, a broad range of actions are included in cyberbullying, such as distributing false information, isolating others, posing as someone else, and spreading humiliating or embarrassing information. This more inclusive definition considers the various ways that people are harmed in virtual environments. Also, it is critical to understand how cyberbullying intersects with other forms of marginalization and discrimination, including ableism, sexism, homophobia, and racism. Rethinking cyberbullying through an intersectional perspective recognizes the difficulties experienced by those who identify as many marginalized identities as well as the aggravating impacts of discrimination.

Cyberbullying, according to Watts & colleagues (2017) is a serious issue today and affects people of all ages and in a variety of ways. Cyberbullying is a troubling practice that has spread throughout the world because of the increased use of technology. Bullies are given a sense of power and control via cyberbullying that they might not otherwise have if they were confronting their victims in person. Also, cyberbullying is a pressing issue with negative consequences for those who engage in it. For instance, Faucher et al. (2014) using a sample of 1925 Canadian university students, found that 24.1% reported having been victims of cyberbullying over the past year. Zalaquett & Chatters (2014) found that 19% of a sample of 613 university students reported having been victims of cyberbullying, whereas 5% reported having been cyberbullying aggressors.

Langos (2012) expanded on the definition of cyberbullying by describing two subsets of it: direct cyberbullying, which only involves the victim and the cyberbully, and indirect cyberbullying, which involves the cyberbully posting information about the victim on a social media platform to

which many people have access. In this regard, she said that there are other components to bullying and cyberbullying, including repetition, power imbalance, and hostility or malicious intent; she explained that without these components, it is challenging to classify a single malicious act as bullying or cyberbullying.

Additionally, cyberbullying uses a variety of online methods for communication, including websites, mobile devices, listservs, and email. There have been several news reports about cyberbullying incidences worldwide. For instance, a 15-year-old boy from Quebec, Canada, unexpectedly rose to fame after several of his classmates uploaded a video of him imitating a Star Wars battle scene to the internet. Millions of people downloaded the brief video. He sought counseling after being so humiliated, and his family has filed a lawsuit against his bullies (Snider & Borel, 2004). Willard (2004) suggested three explanations for why cyberbullying happens: 1) The bully does not physically interact with the victim and cannot understand how the victim might be harmed; 2) The behavior is so common that the bully assumes it is acceptable; and 3) The bully has a false perception of online privacy. According to research studies by Foody & colleagues (2017), cyberbullying can take place via a variety of channels, including phone calls, emails, cyberstalking, and persistently critical text messages. Moreover, cyberbullying victims are more likely to suffer long-lasting reputational harm due to the possibility of public comments and remarks being shared globally and being online indefinitely (Lipton, 2011). Platforms have implemented precautions to safeguard the victims. The content can be saved and reposted, but the limits in place currently require offenders to erase or retract their posts. Although victims are urged to take precautions by reporting harassment to the platform administrators or blocking the harassers, media users frequently fail to recognize the seriousness of online hazards (Saridakis et al., 2016).

The prevalence of cyberbullying has grown over time. The prevalence rates of cyberperpetration and victimization range are between (46.3%) and 13.99 (57.55%), according to a cross-national study that reviewed the literature on the topic from 2015 to 2019. The study also found that the most frequent form of cyberbullying was verbal aggression, and that this behavior could result in depression, substance misuse, posttraumatic stress disorder, and mental problems (Zhu et al., 2021). Additionally, poor levels of social support may result in a feeling of low self-efficacy, which raises the likelihood that individuals may engage in cyberbullying, both as offenders and as victims (Eden et al., 2016).

2.2 Historical Perspective

Studies on cyberbullying have historically focused on young teenagers, with fewer studies being done at the college level. It is remarkable how common cyberbullying is among teenagers. A study by Patchin & Hinduja (2006), which involved 384 youth, found that 11% of participants were cyberbully perpetrators, about 29% were cyber victims, and about 50% were cyberbully observers. However, Li (2007) found in a study of 461 junior high school students from Canada and China that 55.6% of males and 54.5% of females knew someone who had been the victim of cyberbullying. She continued by saying that roughly 30% of her respondents had experienced cyberbullying, and roughly 18% had perpetrated it.

Cyberbullying is on the rise, but what is more concerning is how little it is being reported. Only 35% of respondents, according to Li (2007), said they had experienced adult-specific cyberbullying. Despite just 10% of victims reporting the harassment to their parents, United Press International (UPI) reported in 2008 that 40% of teenagers had experienced cyberbullying. These two studies showed that the harassed individuals believed they had no control over the

situation. When teachers failed to address the problem or gave the impression that they were unaware of it, they were endorsing the conduct, which seemed to validate these findings (Glasner, 2010).

Additionally, some teachers indicated they believed the victims sparked the cyberbullying. Only 6% of cyber victims told an adult (parent, teacher, etc.) about the incidents (Francisco et al., 2015). Walker (2014) stated that all cyber victims, regardless of age, require support to stop the bullying before it has fatal consequences for the victims. According to the research, it is unexpected that victims of cyberbullying would choose not to disclose the incidents if they felt helpless to stop the harassment under any conditions.

According to several research studies, a hostile school environment and a lack of peer support serve as risk factors for cyberbullying behavior (Felmlee & Faris, 2016; Ryan & Curwen, 2013; Williams & Guerra, 2007). According to Corby & colleagues (2016; 2014), cyberbullying victimization of women is on the rise and frequently involves behaviors like stalking, obsessions, or the unauthorized dissemination of pornographic material.

Cyberbullying is also rising in popularity, especially among teenagers, on social media. Lenhart et al. (2011) researched 623 adolescents (12–17) who regularly used social media to determine their perceptions of social media use among teenagers. Eightyfive percent of those surveyed saw unfavorable interactions on social media, with 12% claiming it regularly happened. Not unexpectedly, Festl & Quandt (2013) found that 52% of 12 to 19-year-olds (n = 408) have engaged in online bullying, with 20% of those incidents occurring in Internet chat rooms. According to all these studies, cyberbullying is becoming more common, not just among teenagers but also among college students.

2.3 Types and Forms of Cyberbullying

Cyberbullying has been split between the two primary mediums of the internet and mobile phones in certain research (e.g., Ortega et al., 2009). The line between mobile phone and internet bullying has been complex in recent years due to the development of smartphones, which enable users to send and receive emails via their mobile devices and access the internet more broadly. Numerous elements of cyberbullying (such as gender disparities or effects) do appear to change depending on the exact form of cyberbullying experienced.

In certain studies, cyberbullying has been analyzed through a variety of more focused media. According to secondary school students, Smith, & colleagues (2008) used seven primary media: mobile phone calls, text messages, picture/video clip bullying, emails, chat rooms, instant messaging, and websites. A 9-item measure encompassing similar media was used by Hinduja & Patchin (2010). Wachs & Wolf (2011) again utilized a 5-item measure, but this time, they combined some related media (such as text messages and mobile phone calls) into one category. Cyberbullying in the context of online games has been discovered to be very prevalent in South Korea (Tippett & Kwak, 2012). These are not all forms of cyberbullying and aggression; as technology advances, new forms of cyberbullying appear.

Depending on the available technology, there are various forms of cyberbullying. Internet users can talk privately with friends or "buddies" using instant messaging (IM) programs like iMessage. With these services, young people can create social networks in a setting that combines the chat room's immediate messaging functionality with email's personalized features. Cyberbullies have been able to convey hurtful or offensive remarks to others based on this style of communication. A "buddy list" friend or peer using fictitious screen names may bully children.

Bullying can also happen through text messages, much like it does with instant messaging (IM) services.

In categorizing cyberbullying, Willard (2004) and Abreu & Kenny (2018) identified different forms. These include flaming, which is the act of sending someone an irritating, rude message directly to another person; harassment, which refers to persistently sending someone hostile messages; cyberstalking, which is the act of making obscene or nasty online threats against someone else; outing and trickery, which is the transmitting or posting embarrassing information about a person; exclusion, which is removing someone willfully from an internet group; impersonation, which means posturing as the victim; and sexting, which refers to sending nude photos of another individual without their permission.

Huang & Chou (2010) also examined different forms of cyberbullying behavior by examining three main role groups: victims, offenders, and onlookers. Threatening or harassing behavior was the most frequently reported action by both victims and cyberbullies. This was followed by making jokes or fun of the behavior and spreading rumors. It was different for spectators, who were more likely to make jokes or make fun of it before being threatened or harassed and subsequently spreading rumors. Some researchers also add that these common forms of cyberbullying are different from those that are similar or primarily involve the use of a mobile phone (bullying through calls, texts, picture/video clip bullying, including so-called "happy slapping") or the internet (bullying through emails, chat rooms, instant messaging, and via websites, including blogs) (Smith et al., 2008; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2014).

2.4 Characteristics of Cyberbullying

An earlier survey in New Hampshire in 2000 discovered that approximately 6% of teens had been harassed online (Thorp, 2004). Research by Spitzberg & Hoobler (2002) states that one-third of undergraduate students have reported being stalked online.

In computer-mediated communication systems, text-based name-calling, use of coarse language, profanity, and personal attacks have been observed (Kiesler & Sproull, 1992; Thompsen, 1994). According to Tokunaga (2010), more than 97% of youth in the United States have internet access. The increased number of damaging actions against children and teenagers is an unforeseen consequence of the internet's widespread reach.

According to research by Smith & colleagues (2008) and Casas & colleagues (2013), cyberbullying differs from traditional bullying in that it often lacks the direct face-to-face contact that is common in many forms of traditional bullying. Other distinguishing characteristics of cyberbullying include the 1. potential anonymity of the bully, 2. the more significant potential audience for the abuse being perpetrated, 3. the difficulty of disengaging from the cyber environment, and 4. the absence of these characteristics.

An evaluation of perpetration behavior indicated that 3% of all juveniles examined admitted being perpetrators of both internet harassment and sexual solicitation (Ybarra et al., 2007). Less than 1% (.4%) claimed to be the sole offenders of unwanted sexual solicitation, while 18% claimed to be the sole perpetrators of internet harassment. When both victimization and perpetration behaviors were included, all teenagers who reported being perpetrators of unwanted sexual solicitation also reported being involved in other forms of online victimization and perpetration.

Ybarra & colleagues (2007) also stated that involvement in internet harassment and unwanted sexual solicitation was associated with a higher frequency of reported concurrent psychosocial characteristics compared to uninvolved youth, and this was especially true for youth classified as perpetrator-victims of internet harassment and unwanted sexual solicitation. For example, 75.0% of those in the perpetrator-victims of internet harassment unwanted sexual solicitation category reported inhalant use in the previous year, compared to 4.3% of those in the perpetrator-victims of internet harassment, 1.9% of "victims of internet harassment unwanted sexual solicitation," and 1.0% of "little/no experience" categories (p.001). Furthermore, children participating in cyber-harassment and unwanted sexual solicitation showed signs of perpetration and victimization of aggressiveness in person. 75.2% of those who reported sexual aggression in the last year among the "Perpetrator-Victims of Internet Harassment: Unwanted Sexual Solicitation" group indicated having engaged in sexual assault offline. Since the behavior is recognized as a serious issue, researchers must tell educators and administrators about its prevalence to help them.

2.5 Gender Issues and Cyberbullying

Gender was revealed to be a significant factor in studies on conventional cyberbullying (Borg, 1999; Crick et al., 1999; Seals & Young, 2003). In a study conducted by Crick & colleagues (1999) on bullying behaviors in preschool-aged children, it was discovered that boys experienced much more physical victimization than girls. In contrast, girls experienced more relational victimization (e.g., spreading rumors or excluding someone). Nonetheless, studies on cyberbullying indicate that gender disparities do not always materialize. For example, some studies found no gender differences between males and females as cyberbullies or cybervictims (Calvete, et al., 2010; Hinduja & Patchin, 2008; Li, 2010; Macdonald & RobertsPittman, 2010;

Varjas et al., 2009), others found that females were more likely to become victims of cyberbullying (Adams, 2010; Beckman, et al., 2013; Dehue, et al., 2008; Kowalski, et al., 2008; Li, 2007; Navarro et al., 2013; Slonje, et al., 2012; Smith, et al., 2008).

For instance, in a study involving ninety-two schoolchildren between the ages of 11 and 16, it was discovered that girls were more likely than boys to be the victims of cyberbullying in most cases, regardless of the medium utilized (such as chat rooms or instant messaging) (Smith et al., 2008). When Navarro & colleagues (2013) investigated the role of internet usage and parental mediation in cyber-victimization among 1068 Spanish students from rural public schools (10–12-year-olds), they came to a similar conclusion. The authors discovered apparent differences between the sexes, with more female students claiming they were victims more frequently than male students.

Also, research by Angaston & colleagues (2007) that focuses on gender and female students considers cyberbullying to be a problem. One of the main target subjects, according to both people who have been bullied online and those who have witnessed it, is gender (Smith & Yoon, 2013). The risk of cyberbullying between genders is examined in Navarro & Jasinski's (2013) study. Li (2006) discussed the significance of identifying the role gender plays in cyberbullying. Additionally, gender parallels and disparities in the backgrounds of male and female student respondents are identified in the overall findings of Faucher & colleagues (2014) from Canadian universities.

2.6 Effects of Cyberbullying

Cyberbullying has the potential to harm both the perpetrator and the victim by causing depression and social anxiety. Teenagers frequently experience depression and social anxiety, among other psychological issues (Polanczyk et al., 2015). "Excessive anxiety-related emotional

and behavioral responses and related cognitive patterns" are described as social anxiety symptoms (Schäfer et al., 2017, p. 3). According to Schaffer et al. (2017, p. 5), "sad, empty, or irritable mood along with cognitive and somatic alterations that impact the individual's functioning" are symptoms of depression. According to research by Kendall & colleagues (2010), depression and social anxiety can significantly hinder functioning and result in future mental health illnesses.

The emotional health of youth is impacted by cyberbullying. The presence of Internet harassment is highly associated with depressive symptoms in youngsters who use the Internet often (Ybarra,2004). For instance, at a California high school, most of the students were influenced by the ugly rumors, racist comments, and threats that were so common on a website. As a result, many students became furious, despondent, or unable to concentrate on their studies (Paulson,2007).

Engaging in or being exposed to cyberbullying is linked to behavioral issues, substance abuse, low self-esteem, depression, and behavioral disorders (Cooper et al., 2012). The possible link between intentional self-harm and cyberbullying is also cause for concern. According to a recent meta-analysis, cyberbullying is more strongly linked to suicidal thoughts than traditional bullying. At the same time, there was not enough information to assess the relationship between it and suicide attempts (van Geel et al., 2014).

Roberts & Coursol (1996) and Srabstein & Leventhal (2010), in their research, revealed that children who have been the victims of cyberbullying are more likely to face academic difficulties, low self-esteem, anxiety, and depression, among other psychosocial repercussions. ADHD (attention deficit hyperactivity disorder) has also been linked to cyberbullying (Holmberg & Hjerm, 2008). Research also indicates that cyberbullying, selfharming behavior, and suicide are

related among youth and young adults (Brunstein Klomek et al., 2007; Brunstein Klomek et al., 2010).

Additionally, victims of bullying are more likely to experience adverse social effects such as rejection from peers, a lack of social competence, and a sense of helplessness (Kvarme et al., 2010; Nation et al., 2008). Research has demonstrated an independent correlation between cyberbullying victimization and increased psychological discomfort as well as decreased emotional health (Thomas et al., 2016). Furthermore, increasing data indicates that childhood bullying adversely affects an individual's short- and long-term welfare, lasting into their mid-20s (Copeland et al., 2013).

2.7 Students coping mechanisms

The most frequent coping mechanisms mentioned by teens and adolescents when asked what they would do if they were cyberbullied have been various technical safeguards against online harassment (Arıcak et al., 2008; Smith et al., 2008). These technical fixes can include preventing particular people from contacting you online, changing passwords, usernames, or email addresses, and deleting anonymous SMS messages without opening them. Blocking messages and identities was the most popular response when Smith & colleagues (2008) asked respondents to select the best method for preventing cyberbullying from a list of ideas generated by focus groups. This was also discovered to be the most popular strategy by Arıcak & colleagues (2008) for eradicating cyberbullying.

However, different coping mechanisms are also cited by cyber victims. Examples include altering one's name on internet accounts or changing phone numbers (Arıcak et al., 2008; Juvonen & Gross, 2008; Smith et al., 2008). Some respondents choose more aggressive online coping strategies, such as replying to the bully online, urging them to stop, or even engaging in

bullying themselves. Of course, many kids have pessimistic viewpoints. (Dehue, Bollman, & Völlink, 2008).

Generally, adults encourage bullied students to report their abuse to a teacher or parent. This has had some effectiveness with traditional bullying, but many victims, particularly older students, and guys, are reluctant to tell adults about their victimization (Smith & Shu, 2000). Slonje & Smith (2008) discovered that this reluctance to report is even more pronounced in cyberbullying. In their Swedish sample, not a single cybervictim had informed an adult at school about being targeted. When Canadian kids were asked whom, they would inform if they were the victim of cyberbullying, 74% responded that a friend, 57% said a parent or guardian, and 47% stated school officials (Cassidy et al., 2009). The sample's willingness to inform either the school administration or a parent was reduced with age.

When victims are asked what they did, the percentages drop sharply, even though they appear encouraging. Dehue & colleagues (2008) found that among the Dutch teenagers they surveyed, 13% reported cyberbullying to a friend, 9% to a parent, 7% to no one, and only 2% to a teacher. According to Smith & colleagues (2008), 9% of respondents who had been cyberbullied and 16% of parents had both requested assistances. However, a study by Livingstone & colleagues (2011) of children between the ages of 9 and 16 from 25 different countries found that 77% of the cyber victims had spoken to someone about their experience, including 52% of friends, 13% of siblings, 42% of parents, 8% of other trusted adults, and 7% of teachers.

2.8 Prevention of Cyberbullying

The results of recent studies, especially on cyberbullying, highlight how crucial it is for parents and children to communicate with one another to reduce the risk of cyberbullying. In a 2018 study, Padilla-Walker & colleagues discovered that more

connective co-use and parental discussion reduced the risk of cyberbullying more than restrictive media monitoring strategies, like strict time limits or guidelines about what kinds of media kids can use. Actively engaging with media with kids to build connections is known as "connective co-use" (Padilla-Walker et al., 2018). These results imply that parents can monitor their children's online behavior and provide an example of responsible technology use by conversing with their children and being involved in their media environments.

Also, according to meta-analyses, school-based programs for preventing and intervening with cyberbullying can reduce victimization by up to 14% and perpetration by up to 15%, respectively (Gaffney et al., 2019; Polanin et al., 2022). For example, Polanin et al. (2022) examined the effects of general SEL programs intended to reduce school violence (e.g., Second Step) and comprehensive school-based interventions intended to reduce cyber perpetration and victimization (e.g., Bully Proofing your School, Olweus Bullying Prevention Program, etc.). The study's findings demonstrated the effectiveness of preventative measures in lowering both cyber victimization and cyber perpetration, with cyber perpetration showing larger effect sizes.

These results were in line with those of Gaffney et al. (2019), who discovered that comprehensive bullying prevention programs used in schools might lower the number of bullying incidents and victims. This is encouraging but considering the numerous adverse effects of cyberbullying and victimization, further research is required to fully comprehend practical and workable tactics that teachers can use to stop, report, and deal with cyberbullying in schools.

Training, assemblies, focus days, and student-led initiatives and strategies can all help raise awareness of cyberbullying in the school community. Involving students and considering their viewpoints while developing anti-cyberbullying initiatives might

increase their desire to improve the school environment. Evaluating the cyberbullying issue in schools is another crucial component of cyberbullying prevention. Regular yearly assessment is the secret to assessing the efficacy of the antibullying strategies being implemented. It is crucial to be mindful that greater awareness may lead to increased case reports in the early years.

Examining the existing data on cyberbullying reveals that the problem is worsening. The research currently available is insufficient to draw firm conclusions about this issue, and more research is needed to examine cyberbullying among college students.

2.9 Overview of social media usage in Nigeria

Social media is an interactive online platform that facilitates communication and connections among users. This serves as a space for individuals to engage, share, and establish relationships for various purposes. It enables the formation of social networks based on shared interests, activities, backgrounds, or real-life connections. Through social media, individuals interact with, create, and exchange information and ideas within their networks (Tayo et al., 2019). Social media is becoming increasingly important in Nigeria, particularly among young people. The mobile phone industry has responded to this demand by offering affordable smartphones in the Nigerian market, whereas

communication companies have introduced cheaper data plans to capture their share of the market (Mbanasol et al., 2015).

As of January 2023, Nigeria has a total population of 221.2 million. Internet penetration in the country was 55.4 percent, with 122.5 million internet users. Additionally, 31.6 percent of social media users were in Nigeria, accounting for 14.3 percent of the total population. Furthermore, the number of cellular mobile connections reached 193.9 million, representing 87.7 percent of the

total population. Breaking down the population by age group, 16.1 percent were between 0 and 4 years, 21.9 percent were between 5 and 12 years, 11.6 percent were between 13 and 17 years, 13.1 percent were between 18 and 24 years, and 13.6 percent were between 25 and 34 (Kemp, 2023).

In terms of social media usage, 25.8 percent of Nigeria's internet users engaged with at least one social media platform. Of the social media users, 44.7 percent were female and 55.3 percent were male. Facebook had 21.75 million users, YouTube had 31.6 million users, Instagram had 7.1 million users, Facebook Messenger reached 3.5 million users, LinkedIn had 7.5 million members, Snapchat had 12.35 million users, and Twitter had 4.95 million users in Nigeria as of January 2023. There are fluctuations in the potential ad reach of these platforms between 2022 and 2023. For example, Facebook's potential ad reach decreased by 16.7 percent, YouTube decreased by 4.0 percent, Instagram decreased by 21.5 percent, Facebook Messenger decreased by 13.6 percent, LinkedIn increased by 19.0 percent, Snapchat increased by 30.0 percent, and Twitter increased significantly by 1,421 percent (Kemp, 2023).

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This chapter details the research methodology employed in the study. It provides a transparent and systematic outline of the research design, population of study, sample size and sampling technique, instruments of data collection, methods of data collection, methods of data analysis, and ethical considerations.

3.1 Research Design

This study adopts a quantitative research design to examine cyberbullying and mental health among students in university of Benin. A descriptive survey approach was chosen to systematically collect, analyze, and interpret data from the target population, allowing for an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon and its potential impact on a sustainable future.

3.2. POPULATION OF THE STUDY

The population of the study will consist of student in the Department of sociology and Anthropology in the Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Benin. The Department consist of consist of 4 undergraduate levels (100-400 level). The total number of undergraduate fulltime students in the department currently stands at 387 (Secretary office: Sociology and Anthropology, 2025)

3.3 SAMPLE SIZE

The sample size for this study will be proportionately selected from the 4 levels in the department. A total to 35 respondents with be randomly selected from the each of these departmental levels (100 – 400), making a total of a hundred (140) respondents which will represent the entire population of the students in the faculty of social sciences.

Level	NO. OF RESPONDENTS
100 level	35
200 level	35
300 level	35
400 level	35
Total	140

3.4 SAMPLING TECHNIQUES

The study will adopt a Simple random sampling techniques. This is because the population of undergraduate students of the Department of sociology are all expose to social media and may have been influenced by it at one point in time or the other, hence the use simple random sampling techniques.

Here, to ensure equal and unbiased representation. The researcher will randomly pick equal respondents of both male and female students from each level. This will ensure an equal representation of both gender in the study.

3.5 INSTRUMENT FOR DATA COLLECTION

The research instrument that will be used for this study is a semi structured questionnaire. The type of questionnaire that will be used is a structured questionnaire, as it is both open and closed ended. It will be used to collect quantitative data.

3.6 METHOD OF DATA COLLECTION

The study will employ quantitative method in collecting the data for the study. The research instrument will be self administered by the researcher and collected immediately after the respondents have responded to the questions asked in the questionnaire.

3.7 METHOD OF DATA ANALYSIS

The data collected from respondents will be analyzed using descriptive statistics, which will include simple frequency, percentage and charts, where necessary using a software package known as the statistics package for social sciences (SPSS version 20.0).

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter deals with the data presentation and analysis. Data presentation and analysis from primary data sourced from the administered questionnaires. This section starts with the demographic data of respondents which includes age, sex, marital status, educational attainment and religion which are all aimed at giving a better understanding and perspective on the social and personal factors that influence this phenomenon. The last section includes summary, conclusions and recommendation on the quantitative presentation with tables, and graphs.

4.2 Analysis of Respondents Characteristics

SECTION A: Socio-Demographic Characteristics of The Respondents

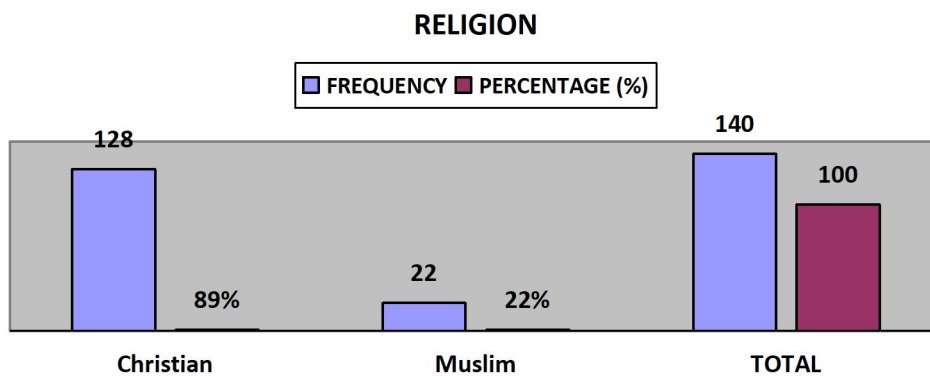
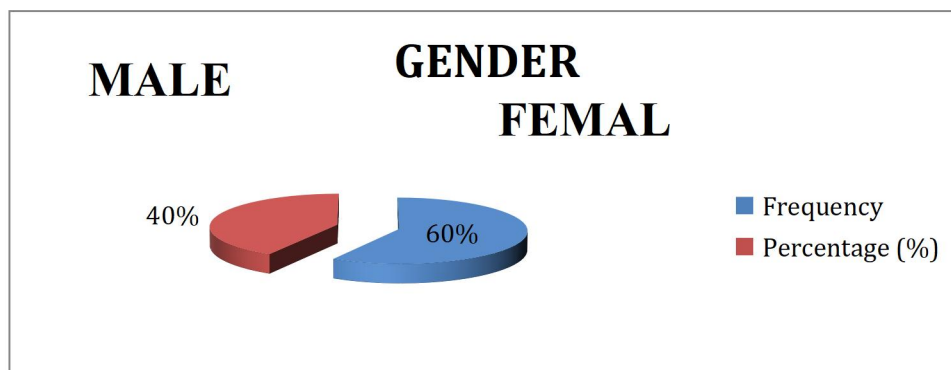
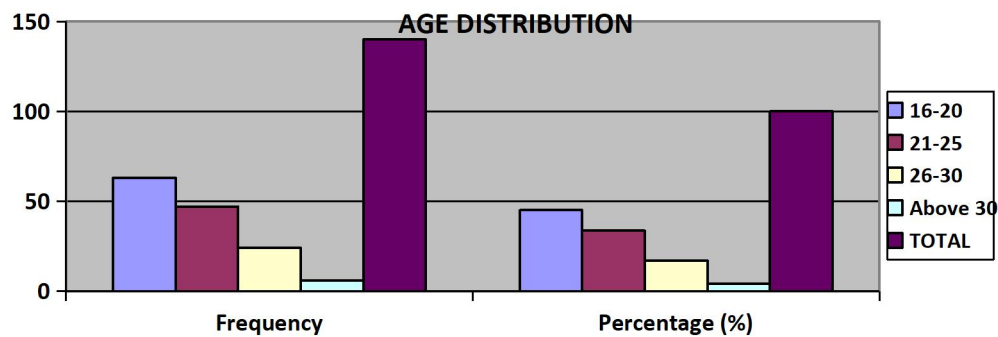
Table 4.1.1:

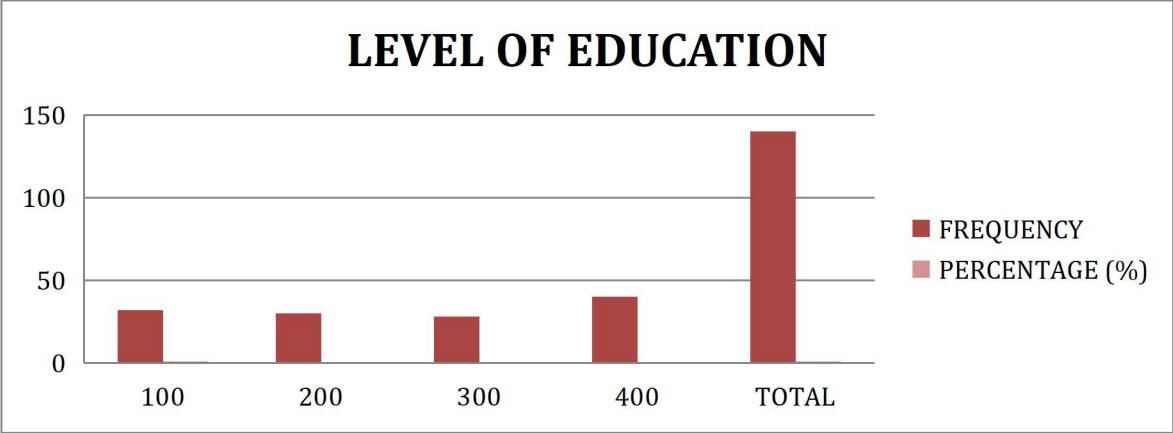
Age Distribution

AGE GROUP	Frequency	Percentage (%)
16-20	63	45.00
21-25	47	33.57
26-30	24	17.14
Above 30	6	4.29
TOTAL	140	100
GENDER	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Female	84	60.00
Male	56	40.00
TOTAL	140	100
LEVEL OF EDUCATION	OF FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE (%)
100	32	32%

200	30	20%
300	28	18%
400	40	30%
TOTAL	140	100%
RELIGION	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE (%)
Christian	128	89%
Muslim	22	22%
TOTAL	140	100

Source: Field survey 2025





According to the table 4.1.1 above, The majority of respondents (78.57%) are aged between 16-25, which aligns with the typical age range of undergraduate students. Only 4.29% of respondents are above 30, suggesting fewer older students participated in the study. Further more, Female respondents (60%) were more than male respondents (40%), indicating that more women participated in the survey. This could suggest that female students are more likely to engage in studies about social issues like cyberbullying. Also, for religion, Table 2.3 shows 78% of the respondents to be Christian and 22% are Muslim. Majority of the respondent were Christians. Lastly in respect of Educational Qualification, The Table above clearly indicates that 32% of the respondents only had primary education, 30% had secondary and 28% progressed to tertiary. 10% of the respondents had no formal education. This indicates that the level of education might be considered as a factor, or a cultural reason for child marriage

CYBER BULLYING AND MENTAL HEALTH AMONG STUDENT IN UNIVERSITY OF BENIN

SECTION B: SECTION B: FORMS OF SOCIAL MEDIA BULLYING

Table 3: *Have you ever experienced or witnessed bullying on social media platforms like WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, or Twitter?*

Experienced Cyberbullying	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	85	60.71
No	55	39.29
TOTAL	140	100

Source: Field survey 2025

According to (Kim & Davis, 2009), the compulsive use of the Internet in a manner that leads to conflicts in important aspects of life and difficulty in establishing limitation on its use is referred to as problematic Internet use. The Table above clearly indicates that a significant number (60.71%) of students reported experiencing cyberbullying. The high prevalence indicates that cyberbullying is a serious issue among university students.

Table 4: *On which social media platform have you observed or experienced the most bullying?*

Platform	Frequency	Percentage (%)
WhatsApp	60	42.86
Facebook	29	20.71
Instagram	21	15.00
Twitter/X	15	10.71

Others	15	10.71
TOTAL	140	100

Source: Field survey 2025

According to Byers & Cerulli (2021) Social media platforms like WhatsApp, commonly used by students at the University of Benin, has the ability to send anonymous messages within groups. While this feature is intended to promote candid and open communication, it has, unfortunately, become a tool for some students to engage in harmful behaviors. The Table above clearly indicates that WhatsApp is the most reported platform for cyberbullying (42.86%), likely due to its frequent use for academic and social interactions. Facebook (20.71%) and Instagram (15.00%) also contribute significantly to cyberbullying cases. Twitter/X and other platforms account for a smaller but still relevant percentage.

Table 5: *What types of social media bullying have you encountered*

Type of Bullying	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Rumors	33	23.57
Threats	31	22.14
Name-calling	28	20.00
Exclusion	26	18.57
Doxxing	22	15.71
TOTAL	140	100

Source: Field survey 2025

The Table above clearly indicates that the most common form of bullying is spreading rumors (23.57%), followed by threats (22.14%). Name-calling and exclusion are also prevalent, showing that cyberbullying takes multiple forms. Doxxing, while lower at 15.71%, is still a concern as it

involves sharing private information without consent. This is in line with Ifeoma, (2022). Cyberbullying encompasses various behaviours, including persistent harassment through emails or texts despite the recipient’s request for no further contact. It can also involve public actions such as threats, defamation, ridicule in online forums, hacking or vandalizing online content about a person, spreading false statements to discredit or humiliate the target, spreading rumors with the intention of inciting hatred, and disclosing personal information to defame or humiliate victims of crime (Ifeoma, 2022).

SECTION C: ANONYMITY AND CYBERBULLYING

Table 6: Does Anonymity Encourage Cyberbullying?

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	92	65.71
No	48	34.29
TOTAL	140	100

Source: Field survey 2025

The Table above clearly indicates that a majority (65.71%) believe that anonymity encourages cyberbullying, likely because it allows bullies to act without consequences. This finding suggests that regulating anonymous accounts could help mitigate cyberbullying. Futhermore this align with Chicos (2022) when he opined that these definitions do not explicitly address the role of anonymity in cyberbullying, which can contribute to the harmful and widespread nature of this

behaviour. Anonymity allows perpetrators to act without fear of consequences and may impact the power dynamics between the bully and the victim.

Table 7: *Have you ever been bullied by someone using an anonymous or fake account?*

Experienced Cyberbullying	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	85	60.71
No	55	39.29
TOTAL	140	100

Source: Field survey 2025

The Table above clearly indicates that a significant number (60.71%) of students reported experiencing cyberbullying. The high prevalence indicates that cyberbullying is a serious issue among university students.

Table 8: *How do you usually respond to anonymous online bullying*

Type of Bullying	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Ignore it	33	23.57
Block the person	31	22.14
Report to the platform	28	20.00
Report to the university authorities	26	18.57
Seek help from friends/family	22	15.71
TOTAL	140	100

Source: Field survey 2025

The Table above clearly indicates that the most common form of response to anonymous online bullying is Ignore it (23.57%), followed by Blocking the person (22.14%). Report to the platform

and Report to the university authorities are also prevalent, showing that there are diverse response to cyberbullying., while lower at 15.71%, is still a important as it involves Seeking help from friends/family. However, different coping mechanisms are also cited by cybervictims. Examples include altering one's name on internet accounts or changing phone numbers (Aricak et al., 2008;

SECTION E: MENTAL HEALTH EFFECTS OF CYBERBULLYING

Table 7: Mental Health Effects of Cyberbullying

Mental Health Effect	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Anxiety	53	37.86
Depression	33	23.57
Stress	27	19.29
Low self-esteem	24	17.14
None	3	2.14
TOTAL	140	100

Source: Field survey 2025

The Table above clearly indicates that anxiety (37.86%) is the most reported mental health effect, followed by depression (23.57%). Stress and low self-esteem are also common consequences. Only 2.14% reported no impact, indicating that cyberbullying significantly affects

mental well-being. Cyberbullying has been a growing concern worldwide, with various studies highlighting its prevalence and impact. In the United States, a significant percentage of teens report experiencing cyberbullying, with detrimental effects on their mental health, including increased anxiety, depression, and in severe cases, suicidal ideation (Kowalski, Giumetti, Schroeder & Lattanner 2014).

Table 7: 18. Did the impact of cyberbullying last for a short period or have long-term Effects

	Frequency	Percentage (%)
The impact of cyberbullying last for a short period or have long-term		
Short-term effects	53	27.86
Long-term effects	87	73.2
TOTAL	140	100

Source: Field survey 2025

The Table above clearly indicates that The impact of cyberbullying last for a short period (27.86%) , however a majority of the respondents opined that The impact of cyberbullying last for a longer period(73.2%). Furthermore, increasing data indicates that childhood bullying adversely affects an individual's short- and long-term welfare, lasting into their mid-20s (Copeland, 2013).

SECTION F: EFFECTIVENESS OF SUPPORT SYSTEMS

Table 8: Awareness of University Support Systems

Aware of Support Systems	Frequency	Percentage (%)
No	85	60.71
Yes	55	39.29
TOTAL	140	100

Source: Field survey 2025

The Table above clearly indicates that 60.71% of students are unaware of any support system for cyberbullying victims, showing a gap in communication or implementation. Raising awareness about available support services could improve students' ability to seek help.

Table 9: Effectiveness of University Support Systems

Perceived Effectiveness	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Somewhat Effective	66	47.14
Not Effective	47	33.57
Very Effective	27	19.29
TOTAL	140	100

Source: Field survey 2025

The Table above clearly indicates that Nearly half (47.14%) believe the support systems are only "somewhat effective." 33.57% think the university's response is "not effective," indicating a need for stronger intervention. Only 19.29% find the support system "very effective," suggesting room for improvement. Also, according to meta-analyses, school-based programs for preventing and intervening with cyberbullying can reduce victimization by up to 14% and perpetration by up to 15%, respectively (Gaffney et al., 2019; Polanin et al., 2022). For example, Polanin et al.

(2022) examined the effects of general SEL programs intended to reduce school violence (e.g., Second Step) and comprehensive school-based interventions intended to reduce cyber perpetration and victimization (e.g., Bully Proofing your School, Olweus Bullying Prevention Program, etc.). The study's findings demonstrated the effectiveness of preventative measures in lowering both cyber victimization and cyber perpetration, with cyber perpetration showing larger effect sizes.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Cyberbullying has become a significant issue among university students, particularly with the widespread use of social media platforms. This study, conducted among 140 students in the Department of Sociology at the University of Benin, sought to examine the prevalence, forms, effects, and institutional responses to cyberbullying. The findings provide a detailed insight into the issue and suggest possible interventions to address it.

1. Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

The age distribution of respondents revealed that **78.57% of students were between the ages of 16 and 25**, which aligns with the typical age range of undergraduate students. This suggests that the findings predominantly reflect the experiences of younger students, who are more active on social media. The gender distribution showed that **60% of the respondents were female, while 40% were male**, indicating a higher participation rate among women in this study. This could suggest that female students are either more affected by cyberbullying or more willing to participate in studies about social issues. Research has shown that women are more likely to report online harassment, particularly in social settings like universities.

2. Prevalence of Cyberbullying

The study found that 60.71% of students had experienced cyberbullying, highlighting that the issue is widespread in the university environment. This aligns with global trends where a significant portion of young people report online harassment. The finding is concerning, as cyberbullying can have serious social and psychological consequences for victims.

The high prevalence suggests that cyberbullying is not an isolated issue but rather a common experience for students. The 39.29% who reported not experiencing cyberbullying may include those who have not personally been targeted but may still have witnessed or been affected indirectly by online harassment.

3. Common Platforms for Cyberbullying

Among social media platforms, WhatsApp was identified as the most common platform for cyberbullying (42.86%), followed by Facebook (20.71%), Instagram (15.00%), and Twitter/X (10.71%). This result is significant because WhatsApp is generally considered a private messaging platform. The high percentage of bullying occurring on WhatsApp suggests that cyberbullying often happens within closed groups or private conversations, making it harder to detect and regulate. This could include harassment in academic groups, personal attacks, or exclusion from discussions.

Facebook and Instagram, being more public platforms, were also notable sites for cyberbullying. Since these platforms emphasize social interaction, they allow for the spread of rumors, public shaming, and targeted harassment. The relatively lower percentage for Twitter/X suggests that

while cyberbullying occurs there, it may not be as common among this particular student population.

4. Forms of Cyberbullying

The most common form of cyberbullying reported was spreading rumors (23.57%), followed by threats (22.14%), name-calling (20.00%), exclusion from groups (18.57%), and doxxing (15.71%). These findings highlight that cyberbullying takes multiple forms, ranging from verbal abuse to privacy violations.

- **Rumors and threats** were particularly prevalent, which suggests that students often face attacks on their reputation and personal security. These forms of bullying can be extremely damaging, leading to anxiety and distress.
- **Exclusion and doxxing** are also significant issues. Exclusion, where a student is deliberately left out of social or academic groups, can lead to social isolation. Doxxing, which involves exposing private or sensitive information, can have severe consequences, including personal safety risks.

The diversity in forms of cyberbullying indicates that there is no single way that students experience online harassment. Addressing cyberbullying must therefore involve tackling both verbal aggression and privacy violations.

5. Role of Anonymity in Cyberbullying

A significant majority of respondents (65.71%) believed that anonymity encourages cyberbullying, while only 34.29% disagreed. This finding supports the idea that people are more

likely to engage in harmful behaviors when they feel they cannot be identified. Anonymity provides a shield for cyberbullies, allowing them to harass others without fear of consequences.

Many social media platforms allow for anonymous accounts or pseudonyms, making it difficult to track down offenders. The perception that anonymity contributes to bullying suggests that stricter regulations or reporting mechanisms may be needed to reduce anonymous harassment.

6. Mental Health Effects of Cyberbullying

The study found that cyberbullying has severe psychological consequences, with the most common effects being: Anxiety (37.86%) Depression (23.57%) Stress (19.29%) Low self-esteem (17.14%) Only 2.14% of respondents reported no mental health impact, emphasizing how damaging cyberbullying can be. Anxiety was the most commonly reported effect, which aligns with studies showing that online harassment can create a persistent fear of social interactions, even in real life. Depression and low self-esteem are also concerning, as they can lead to academic decline and withdrawal from social activities.

These findings highlight the urgent need for mental health interventions for victims of cyberbullying. Universities should provide counseling services and peer support groups to help students cope with the psychological effects of online harassment.

7. Awareness of University Support Systems

Despite the significant impact of cyberbullying, 60.71% of students reported being unaware of any support systems at the university, while only 39.29% knew about them. This lack of awareness indicates a major gap in the university's approach to addressing cyberbullying. If

students do not know where to seek help, they are less likely to report cases or receive necessary support.

The findings suggest that the university needs to improve its communication about available resources. This could involve integrating cyberbullying awareness into orientation programs, sending regular emails to students about support services, and promoting anti-bullying initiatives on campus.

8. Effectiveness of University Support Systems

Even among those aware of the university's support systems, opinions on their effectiveness varied: 47.14% found them "somewhat effective" 33.57% believed they were "not effective" Only 19.29% rated them as "very effective". These results indicate that while some support exists, many students feel that it is inadequate. The fact that one-third of respondents found the system ineffective suggests that existing interventions may not be addressing students' needs effectively. Possible reasons for this perception could include: A lack of trained professionals to handle cyberbullying cases, Ineffective policies for punishing offenders, Insufficient mental health services, Addressing these gaps will require the university to re-evaluate its approach to cyberbullying and mental health support.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Summary of Findings

The study focused on cyberbullying and its impact on the mental health of students at the University of Benin. Through a sample of 140 students, the research explored the prevalence, forms, platforms, and the psychological effects of cyberbullying, as well as the effectiveness of the existing support systems in addressing the issue.

Key findings revealed that 60.71% of students had experienced cyberbullying, and WhatsApp emerged as the primary platform for such occurrences, followed by Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter/X. The most common forms of bullying included spreading rumors, threats, name-calling, and exclusion from social groups. These findings suggest that cyberbullying is both a public and private issue, with WhatsApp being a significant space for harassment despite being a more personal platform.

Additionally, the research found that the anonymity feature provided by many social media platforms played a crucial role in encouraging bullying, as 65.71% of respondents felt that the ability to remain anonymous made individuals more likely to engage in harmful behavior.

The mental health impact of cyberbullying was also significant, with anxiety being the most common psychological consequence (reported by **37.86%** of respondents), followed by depression and stress. Many students also reported low self-esteem and a sense of social isolation. These findings underscore the severe consequences of cyberbullying, affecting students' mental well-being and overall academic performance.

The study also highlighted a concerning lack of awareness regarding support systems at the University of Benin, with **60.71%** of students reporting that they were unaware of available resources. For those who were aware, the effectiveness of these support systems was questioned, as only 19.29% found them to be very effective. This indicates that while resources may exist, they are not perceived as adequately addressing the needs of students affected by cyberbullying.

5.2 Conclusion

The findings of this study confirm that cyberbullying is a pervasive issue among students at the University of Benin. The high prevalence of cyberbullying, coupled with the mental health consequences observed, indicates that this issue requires urgent attention. The findings suggest that the anonymity provided by social media platforms contributes significantly to the rise in cyberbullying, as individuals are emboldened to act without fear of identification.

The mental health consequences of cyberbullying, including anxiety, depression, and stress, are deeply concerning, as they not only affect the victims' well-being but also hinder their academic success and social participation. The low awareness of available support systems, along with their perceived ineffectiveness, highlights a gap in addressing the needs of students who are victims of cyberbullying.

These findings reinforce the need for the university to take proactive measures in raising awareness about cyberbullying, enhancing the effectiveness of existing support systems, and implementing policies to prevent and respond to such incidents more effectively. The study also emphasizes the importance of mental health support for students affected by cyberbullying.

5.3 Recommendations

Based on the findings, the study makes the following recommendations to help mitigate the issue of cyberbullying at the University of Benin and to provide better support for affected students:

1. Strengthen Cyberbullying Awareness and Education

- The university should organize awareness campaigns to educate students about the risks of cyberbullying, its impact on mental health, and how to protect themselves online. This could include seminars, workshops, and online resources that provide information about safe social media practices.
- Orientation programs for new students should incorporate cyberbullying awareness to help students recognize and report incidents of harassment early on.

2. Enhance Support Systems for Victims

- The university should improve the accessibility and visibility of existing support systems, such as counseling services and peer support groups, to ensure that students know where to turn when they are affected by cyberbullying.
- A **24/7 online support system** should be established to provide immediate assistance to students facing cyberbullying, particularly during out-of-office hours.

3. **Implement Stricter University Policies Against Cyberbullying**

- The university should adopt and enforce **clear policies** that define what constitutes cyberbullying and outline the consequences for those who engage in it. These policies should be made available to all students through the university website, handbooks, and during orientation sessions.
- **Monitoring systems** could be implemented on university-run social media platforms and forums to detect and address incidents of harassment promptly.

4. **Promote Positive Online Behavior and Anonymity Accountability**

- The university should work with social media platforms to ensure that students using university-related online spaces are held accountable for their actions. **Anonymity features** should be regulated, particularly in group settings, to prevent malicious behavior.
- Students should be encouraged to use **non-anonymous profiles** when engaging in online discussions related to the university to create a more responsible online community.

5. **Provide Mental Health Support and Counseling Services**

- The university should ensure that students affected by cyberbullying have access to **comprehensive mental health support**, including counseling, therapy, and mental health workshops.
- **Peer counseling** programs can also be established to offer additional emotional support, helping students cope with the psychological effects of cyberbullying in a safe and confidential environment.

6. **Engage Parents and Guardians in Prevention Efforts**

- The university could consider involving parents and guardians in raising awareness about cyberbullying, especially since many students may not know how to handle such issues on their own. Awareness programs should include discussions on the role of parents in identifying and addressing cyberbullying in their children's lives.

7. **Collaboration with Law Enforcement and Legal Authorities**

- The university should collaborate with **law enforcement** and other legal bodies to ensure that any criminal activities associated with cyberbullying are appropriately addressed. This includes cases of **online harassment** that escalate to real-world threats or physical harm.

By adopting these recommendations, the University of Benin can create a **safer online environment** for students, reduce the occurrence of cyberbullying, and provide better support for those affected by it. The ultimate goal is to ensure that every student has the opportunity to thrive academically and socially, without the fear of being harassed online.

These recommendations, if implemented, would contribute to reducing cyberbullying, enhancing mental health support, and promoting a positive online culture within the university, ensuring that students can fully benefit from their academic and social experiences.

QUESTIONNAIRE:

CYBER BULLYING AND MENTAL HEALTH AMONG STUDENT IN UNIVERSITY OF BENIN

Introduction

My name is ChiemeKwele Rita and am carry out a research on cyber bullying and mental health among students in university of Benin. The questionnaire aims understand cyber bullying and mental health among student in university of Benin Your honest responses will help me identify the common challenges students face concerning cyber bullying in university and how it affect them mentally

Please be assured that all responses will be kept confidential.

Instructions: Please answer each question to the best of your ability. There are no right or wrong answers. If you are uncomfortable answering any question, please feel free to leave it blank.

Section A: Demographic Information

1. Age: 16–20 21–25 26–30 Above 30

- 2. Gender: Male Female Prefer not to say
- 3. Faculty/Department: (.....)
- 4. Level of Study: 100 Level 200 Level 300 Level 400 Level

Section B: Forms of Social Media Bullying

- 5. Have you ever experienced or witnessed bullying on social media platforms like WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, or Twitter? Yes No
- 6. What types of social media bullying have you encountered? (Check all that apply)
 - Name-calling and insults
 - Spreading false rumors
 - Threats or intimidation
 - Posting embarrassing photos/videos without consent
 - Exclusion from online groups (silent treatment)
 - Doxxing (sharing private information without consent)
 - Others (please specify): _____
- 7. On which social media platform have you observed or experienced the most bullying?
 - WhatsApp Facebook Instagram Twitter/X Snapchat TikTok Others: _____
- 8. Have you ever reported a case of social media bullying?
 - Yes No

Section C: Anonymity and Cyberbullying

- 9. Do you believe that anonymous or fake accounts contribute to cyberbullying at the University of Benin? Yes No
- 10. If yes, in what ways does anonymity encourage bullying? (Open-ended)

.....

.....
- 11. Have you ever been bullied by someone using an anonymous or fake account?
 - Yes No
- 12. How do you usually respond to anonymous online bullying? (Check all that apply)
 - Ignore it Block the person
 - Report to the platform
 - Report to the university authorities
 - Seek help from friends/family
 - Others: _____

Section D: Prevalence of Social Media Bullying

- 13. How often do you witness or experience cyberbullying at the University of Benin?
 - Daily Weekly Monthly Rarely Never
- 14. Have you ever been personally affected by cyberbullying? Yes No
- 15. If yes, what was the nature of the bullying? (Open-ended)

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Section E: Mental Health Effects of Cyberbullying

16. Have you ever experienced emotional distress due to social media bullying? Yes No

17. If yes, what kind of mental health effects did you experience? (Check all that apply)

Anxiety Depression Stress Low self-esteem Suicidal thoughts Difficulty concentrating on studies Sleep disturbances Others: _____

18. Did the impact of cyberbullying last for a short period or have long-term effects?

Short-term effects

Long-term effects

19. What coping mechanisms did you use to deal with the bullying?

.....
.....

Section F: Effectiveness of Support Systems

20. Are you aware of any university policies or support systems for victims of cyberbullying?

Yes No

21. If yes, which support services do you know about?

.....
.....

22. Have you ever sought help from the university or a mental health professional due to cyberbullying? Yes No

23. How effective do you think the university's response to cyberbullying is?

Very effective Somewhat effective Not effective

24. What suggestions do you have for improving support systems for cyberbullying victims at the University of Benin?

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Thank you for participating in this study. Your responses will help in understanding and addressing cyberbullying and mental health challenges among students

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