Cyberbullying as a Predictor of Social Anxiety among Students of Faculty of Social Sciences at the Enugu State University of Science and Technology (Nigeria)

Cyberprzemoc jako predyktor lęku społecznego wśród studentów Wydziału Nauk Społecznych na Uniwersytecie Nauk i Technologii w Stanie Enugu (Nigeria)

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Abstract: Cyberbullying includes sending, posting, or sharing negative, harmful, false, or mean content about someone else. It can include sharing personal or private information about someone else causing embarrassment or humiliation. In fact, comments, photos, posts and contents shared by individuals can often be viewed by strangers as well as acquaintances. Cyberbullying is one of the factors that leads to social anxiety. This study seeks to fill critical gaps in the current literature by examining the relationship between cyberbullying and social anxiety among students of faculty of social sciences in Enugu State University of Science and Technology. One hundred (100) undergraduate students (42 male and 58 female) participated in this study. They participants comprised of. The summary of the findings is that gender, age, department and level were not significantly related to social anxiety among students. Again, cyberbullying was positively significantly related to social anxiety among students. It is crucial to educate undergraduates on the safety of cyberspace.

Keywords: Cyberbullying, social anxiety, prevention

Abstrakt: Cyberprzemoc obejmuje wysyłanie, publikowanie lub udostępnianie negatywnych, szkodliwych, fałszywych lub złośliwych treści na temat kogoś innego. Może obejmować udostępnianie osobistych lub prywatnych informacji o kimś innym, powodując zażenowanie lub upokorzenie. W rzeczywistości komentarze, zdjęcia, posty i treści udostępniane przez osoby mogą być często oglądane zarówno przez nieznajomych, jak i znajomych. Cyberprzemoc jest jednym z czynników prowadzących do lęku społecznego. Niniejsze badanie ma na celu wypełnienie krytycznych luk w bieżącej literaturze poprzez zbadanie związku między cyberprzemocą a lękiem społecznym wśród studentów Wydziału Nauk Społecznych na Enugu State University of Science and Technology w Nigerii. W badaniu wzięło udział stu (100) studentów (42 mężczyzn i 58 kobiet) będących na studiach licencjackich. Wyniki badań wskazują, iż płeć, wiek, wydział i poziom studiów nie były istotnie związane z lękiem społecznym wśród studentów. Cyberprzemoc była okazała się natomiast istotnie związana z lękiem społecznym wśród studentów. Wskazuje się jako bardzo ważny aspekt edukowanie studentów na temat bezpieczeństwa cyberprzestrzeni.

Słowa kluczowe: Cyberprzemoc, lęk społeczny, zapobieganie

Introduction

There are some students who feel nervous and uncomfortable in a social situation especially before making a presentation. Obviously, they suffer from social anxiety. Social phobia, also known as Social Anxiety Disorder (SAD), is a mental health condition characterized by an intense and persistent fear of social situations and performance situations. Individuals with social phobia often fear being judged, embarrassed, or negatively evaluated by others, leading to avoidance of social interactions. This disorder can significantly impact various aspects of daily life, including relationships, work, and overall well-being. Social Anxiety is feeling tense, nervous, or frightened in situations that involve other people. Social anxiety is a normal part of life, but it can sometimes have a negative impact on an individual's life (Hope, Heimberg and Turk 2010).

Fear is a basic human emotion. In humans, fear is controlled, in part, by an area of the brain called the limbic system. The limbic system includes some of the deepest, most primitive structures of the brain, structures shared by many less evolved animals. In fact, there is reason to believe that the emotion of fear is present across most, if not all, animal species. Most people use the term fear and anxiety interchangeably. Anxiety is a future-oriented feeling of dread or apprehension associated with the sense that events are both uncontrollable and unpredictable. In other words, anxiety is a nagging feeling that occurs when a person believes a negative event occur in the future and that nothing can be done to prevent it. People who feel anxious tend to dwell upon and ruminate about the possibility of danger (Antony and Swinson 2008).

In a nutshell, we can state that social anxiety disorder is characterized by an intense fear of social or performance situations. In these situations, people with social anxiety disorder are worried about embarrassment, humiliation, or scrutiny by others. Some situations that people with social anxiety disorder often fear include; conversations, meeting new people, calling acquaintances or strangers on the phone, talking to authority figures, expressing a controversial opinion or disagreement, being assertive, speaking in front of a group, participating in a meeting, entering a crowded room, being the center of attention, eating or drinking in front of others, writing in front of others, making mistakes in front of others, etc. (Antony and Rowa 2008).

It is interesting to know that many researchers (for example, Clark and Wells in 1995) have been studying to find out the cause of social anxiety disorder. In fact, some of their results show that social anxiety disorder sometimes runs in families, but no one knows for sure why some family members have it while others do not have it. Researchers have found that several parts of the brain are involved in fear and anxiety. Some researchers think that misreading of others' behavior may play a role in causing or worsening social anxiety. For example, you may think that people are staring or frowning at you when they truly are not. Underdeveloped social skills are another possible contributor to social anxiety. For example, if you have underdeveloped social skills, you may feel discouraged after talking with

people and may worry about doing it in the future. By learning more about fear and anxiety in the brain, scientists may be able to create better treatments. Researchers are also looking for ways in which stress and environmental factors may play a role (National Institute of Mental Health 2016).

There are several factors contributing to social anxiety. Cyberbullying is one of the factors that lead to social anxiety. At this point, we need to ask a fundamental question. What is cyberbullying? Cyberbullying includes sending, posting, or sharing negative, harmful, false, or mean content about someone else. It can include sharing personal or private information about someone else causing embarrassment or humiliation. In fact, comments, photos, posts and contents shared by individuals can often be viewed by strangers as well as acquaintances. The content share online (both their personal content as well as any negative, mean, or hurtful content) is permanent and it may be seen by classmates, teachers, and relatives in the present or in the future. Cyberbullying can harm the online reputation of everyone concerned: the bully, the victim, the audience (Balloni and Sette 2020).

Cyberbullying is a recent phenomenon and is another form of bullying behaviour. Cyberbullying, like other forms of bullying behaviour, is about relationship, power and control. There is no doubt the nature of adolescent aggression has evolved due to the proliferation of technology and their access to information. As technology evolved, cyberbullying has increased. The impacts of cyberbullying cannot be underestimated. The psychological and emotional impacts of cyberbullying on young people are similar to those of offline bullying behaviours. The difference is that offline bullying usually stops when the school ends. In cyberbullying there is no escape, technology follows into what was the safety of their own home (Chadwick 2014).

The causes of cyberbullying include internal factors such as highlighting the ego to hurt others because they have certain motives and external factors such as communication relationships in the family, peer pressure, revenge, etc. With regards to revenge, the perpetrators carry out the action in several ways. For instance, flaming (anger) which refers to the existence of hatred between two or more individuals who occur through each communication technology. Usually, flaming occurs in public environments such as chatrooms or discussion groups rather than electronic mail. Next is harassment in the form of messages that contain abusive, insulting or unwanted messages, repeatedly sending dangerous messages to someone online (Nurfarhanah et al. 2019).

Undergraduate students access the internet for a variety of reasons. These purposes include creation, such as communicating in online groups or playing games; academics, such as doing assignments, researching scholarships, or completing online applications; and students, who increasingly use the internet for social communications. Victims of online bullying experience negative psychological outcomes such as depression, anxiety, social dissatisfaction, negative school attitudes, and, in some cases, substance abuse, as well as suicide attempts and physical harm (Vaghchipawala 2023).

1. Purpose of Study

This study seeks to fill critical gaps in the current literature by examining the relationship between cyber-bullying and social anxiety among students of faculty of social sciences in Enugu State University of Science and Technology. Specifically, it aims to investigate cyber-bullying as a predictor of social anxiety, considering the unique cultural and social factors within this sample population. Furthermore, the study intends to provide a comprehensive understanding of the behavioral manifestations resulting from cyber-bullying experiences and their subsequent impact on social anxiety. By addressing these gaps, the research aims to contribute valuable insights that can inform interventions and support mechanisms to mitigate the negative effects of cyber-bullying and promote the psychological well-being of the above-mentioned undergraduate students.

2. Literature Review

Numerous studies have shown interests in our variables of study but we will like to limit ourselves to two theories namely social learning theory and cognitive behavioral therapy.

Social learning theory exists because Albert Bandura felt that that behavioural theory could not explain everything about learning. Bandura was influenced into developing this theory after observing children's behaviour as an adult act aggressively. In 1978, he stated that people are not born with preformed repertoires of aggressive behaviour; they must learn them. Most aggressive activities-whether duelling, military combat, or vengeful ridicule-entail intricate skills that require extensive learning. Virtually all learning resulting from direct experience can also occur on a vicarious basis by observing the behavior of others and its consequences (Bandura 1977). Therefore, this theory emphasizes the function of social conditioning, in particular reference to the way that parental educational systems, social and cultural expectations (of peers and family members) and some reference models (parents, teachers and, friends) exert a significant influence on children (Gil 2001).

On the other hand, Bandura supports the theory that fear and anxiety are learned, but enumerates four social mechanisms for learning: First, fear may be learned through classical conditioning in exactly the same way as described. Second, the proxy experience can be considered important. This process is also called role modeling. Third, symbolic education, which refers to learning through education, reading, or saying that certain things are threatening, painful, or forbidden. Fourth, refers to symbolic logic, which is potentially important in creating anxiety. One may conclude that something is dangerous. This process may be logical or irrational (Orouji and Saeid 2022).

Social learning theory equally offers insights into the relationship between cyberbullying and social anxiety, particularly among adolescents and young adults. In the context of cyberbullying, social learning theory highlights the following points: it

asserts that individuals learn by observing the behaviors of others and the consequences of those behaviors. In the case of cyberbullying, victims may observe aggressive and hurtful online behaviors directed at them, which can contribute to heightened social anxiety (Bandura 1977). Cyberbullying often involves aggressive behaviors, including verbal abuse, harassment, and humiliation (Beth and Bynum 2016).

Cognitive behavioral therapy is based on the concept that our thoughts, perceptions, and emotions all have a strong influence on our behaviour. How we think about a specific situation in our life can directly influence how we deal with it. Cognitive behavioral therapy follows the premise that our thoughts and feelings play a fundamental role in determining our behaviour, and that over time, we tend to develop specific patterns of thinking and feeling. If these patterns are destructive, unhealthy, or unrealistic, they can have a negative impact on behaviour. The way we perceive a situation may have more of an influence on our reaction to it than the situation itself (Wells and Goleman 2021). In the case of social anxiety, negative experiences may reinforce the individual's anxiety and avoidance. Cognitive-behavioral theory assumes that individuals can learn new coping skills and strategies to manage their anxiety.

Cognitive-behavioral theory assumes that thoughts and beliefs play a key role in shaping our behavior. In the case of social anxiety, negative thoughts and beliefs about oneself, others, and can lead to avoidance and other unhelpful behaviors. This theory helps individuals identify and challenge their thoughts patterns. Through this process individuals can change their behaviors and emotional responses leading to improved mental health and overall well-being (Shapiro 2019).

3. Hypothesis

Cyberbullying will significantly predict social anxiety among students of faculty of social sciences in Enugu State University of Science and Technology (ESUT) undergraduates.

4. Participants

One hundred (100) students participated in this study. The participants comprised of 42 male and 58 female undergraduate students. These students were between ages of 19-23 years, with a mean age of 20.33 and a standard deviation of 1.96. They were selected by making use of availability sample technique from the population of student of Enugu State University of Science and Technology (ESUT), Enugu State. Demographic variables such as gender, age and class were explored.

5. Instruments

Two instruments were used to gather information in this study. They include: Cyberbullying Scale (CBS) (Stewart et al. 2014) and Social Anxiety Scale (Liebowitz 1987; Greist et al. 1995).

6. Procedure

A total of one hundred and thirty (130) copies of the questionnaires on cyberbullying and social anxiety were randomly distributed to the target population. The researchers established a rapport with the participants. To this effect, participants were informed that responses were confidential and that participation was completely voluntary. The administration of the questionnaire took place in their respective classrooms. They were selected by the use of convenient sampling technique from population of undergraduate students from faculty of social sciences; 19 from political science department, 23 from education department, 44 from psychology department, 14 from sociology department in Enugu State University of Science and Technology, Agbani Campus, Enugu State. The aim and the nature of the study were explained to the participants, while being assured of confidentiality of their responses. The administration of the questionnaires was done in the various classes during the lecture free periods. The participants were all undergraduates drawn from Enugu State University of Science and Technology (ESUT). The participants were selected making use of availability sampling technique. A total number of 130 questionnaires were distributed, 130 were returned while 100 were properly filled after a recheck and were used for data analysis.

7. Design and Statistics

The design used for this study is cross-sectional survey design; while stepwise multiple regression analysis was the statistics used to evaluate the predictor variable (cyber-bullying) on social anxiety which is dependent variable.

8. Results

Table 1: Correlations of demographic variables (gender, age, department and level), cyberbullying and social anxiety

Variables	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6
1 Gender	1.58	.50	--					
2 Age	20.33	1.96	-.29**	--				
3 Department	2.53	.96	-.04	-.12	--			
4 Level	2.37	.85	-.18	.71***	.01	--		
5 Cyber Bullying	40.15	11.75	-.09	.02	-.02	-.05	--	
6 Social Anxiety	31.91	8.68	-.13	.01	-.07	.11	.08**	--

NB: **$p < .01$, *$p < .05$

Result of table one above showed that none of the demographic variables, gender (r = -.13) age (r = .01), department (r = -.07), and level (r = .11) have significant relationship with social anxiety among students. Cyberbullying was positively significantly related to social anxiety among students (r = .08, p < .01). The significant relationship implies that an increase in cyberbullying tend to increase social anxiety among students.

Table 2: Step wise multiple regression predicting social anxiety from cyberbullying

Variables	Step1	Step 2
Gender	-.15	-.16
Age	-.21	-.20
Department	-.10	-.10
Level	.23	.22
Cyberbullying		.08**
R	.22	.24**
R^2	.05	.16**
R^2 change	.05	.26**
F value	F (4,95) = 1.24	F (5, 94) = 1.11

Note: *=p<.05

The results of the Step Wise Multiple Regression in Table 2 above indicated that the demographic variables, gender (β = -.15, p> .05), age (β = -.21, p> .05), department (β = -.10, p> .05, p> .05), and level (β = .23, p< .05) were not significant predictors of social anxiety among students. The demographic variables however accounted for none significant 22% variance as predictors of social anxiety among students (R = .22, p> .05). Cyber bullying entered in step 2 of the equation positively significantly predicted social anxiety among students (β = .08, p< .01). It accounted for significant 26% variance in predicting social anxiety among students ($\Delta R2$ = .26, p< .01). This finding means that any form of bully students get makes them experience more social anxiety. Therefore, cyber bullying is indicated as a potential factor that explains social anxiety among students.

9. Summary of Findings

Gender, age, department and level were not significantly related to social anxiety among students.

Cyber bullying was positively significantly related to social anxiety among students.

10. Implication of the Study

The findings of the study have many implications. In the findings, cyberbullying was positively significantly related to social anxiety among students. Cyberbullying is a common ugly phenomenon that has negative repercussions on students. Social anxiety happens to be one of the negative mental health consequences. Social anxiety is a common negative psychological trait presented by people in real-world or virtual-space interaction situations, specifically referring to irrational fears that individuals have during social interaction due to fear of attention, observation, scrutiny, or evaluation by others. Therefore, cyberbullying experiences exacerbate undergraduate students' negative focus on self and produce negative self-evaluations, further contributing to the worsening of social anxiety (Xia et al. 2023).

Cyberbullying can have serious consequence on the victim like social anxiety. To prevent cyberbullying, it is important to raise awareness about the issue and educate people about its impact. Lecturers in faculty of social science and parents of the students can work together to create safe and supportive environment for the undergraduate students, both online and offline. This can include teaching digital citizenship skills, encouraging open communication, promoting empathy and kindness. Encouraging the students to report to the appropriate authorities if they are being cyberbullied (Altinay and Altinay 2024).

11. Limitations of the Study

The first limitation of the study centers on the number of the participants. The small sample size may not be good enough to make generalization. Secondly, some students were in a rush in filling the questionnaire without properly going through the items before responding. Due to this reason, some of the respondents were unable to correctly fill the questionnaires. Due to this reason, some questionnaires were invalid and were not part of those used for scoring. Creating rapport with the respondents was difficult, as the students were busy for the forthcoming semester exam.

12. Suggestions for Further Studies

In respect to further studies, the researchers make the following suggestions. Future researchers should consider studying the relationship between age and gender in cyberbullying. Finding out which gender that is believed to be at a higher risk of cyberbullying.

Summary and Conclusion

It is crucial to educate undergraduates on the safety of cyberspace. Today's young people are growing up on a diet of technology with immediate access to worldwide social connections. Because it has become so common in our society for them

to have cell phone, laptop, iphone, ipad, etc. The unfortunate thing is that most times we forget about the window of danger this opens. Many young people have taken their own lives because of abusive acts of cyberbullying. It is of paramount importance for students who experience cyberbullying to seek out support from a school counselor, professional therapist, or an appropriate support group (Kenley 2017). If cyberbullying is reduced, the school environment will have few cases of social anxiety. One the other hand, the students need to work on themselves because overcoming social anxiety equally depend on one's individual personality.

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