

Cyber Bullying Among Learners in Higher Educational Institutions in Sub-Saharan Africa: Examining Challenges and Possible Mitigations

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Received: January 14, 2020

Accepted: February 25, 2020

Online Published: March 16, 2020

doi:10.5539/hes.v10n2p53

URL: <https://doi.org/10.5539/hes.v10n2p53>

Abstract

Proliferation of technology in the form of internet, mobile phone and social media access and usage is exposing many youths to cyber bullying activities. Cyber bullying activities are viewed as negative consequences of growth and development in technology. Many of the victims of cyber bullying include those that have been trapped in the technology through obsessive and addictive behaviours. The study was conducted in order to understand cyber bullying in educational institutions in Sub-Saharan Africa. The study is guided by the following five objectives: understanding cyber bullying and its manifestations among learners in education institutions; explore contributing factors in education institutions; determine the prevalence of cyber bullying in education institutions; examine the effects of cyber bullying among learners in education institutions and determine ways of dealing with cyber bullying among learners in education institution. The study adopted a case study approach and involved 123 respondents with a response rate of 64% (n=192). A survey questionnaire was used to collect data. Resulting data was analysed using statistical package for social sciences (SPSS). Evidence suggests that cyber bullying has serious psychological harm on the victims some leading to suicidal thoughts and suicide, among others. The study concludes that the effects of cyber bullying are far reaching and devastating to the learners and the institutional safety as well. The study recommends that more research and awareness are needed in an effort to control this menace and make outreaching and learning institutions safe.

Keywords: cyber bullying, characteristics, Sub-Saharan Africa, educational, impact, prevalence, mitigation

1. Introduction

Use of internet and social media is associated with both benefits and consequences. Positive benefits include access to information, access to teaching and learning resources, increased levels of social support and social connectedness. Negative consequences associated with the use of internet and social media include exposure to sexual materials, cybercrime and cyber bullying. This article focuses on cyber bullying. Cyber bullying has been defined as “sending or posting harmful or cruel texts or images using internet or other digital communication devices” (Willard, 2004: 1). Cyber bullying involves the use of information and communication technologies such as email, cell phone, and pager text messages, instant messaging, defamatory personal websites and defamatory online personal policy websites to support deliberate, repeated and hostile behaviour by an individual or group that is intended to harm others (Li, 2010). Cyber bullying has been associated with various devastating effects, among them, low self-esteem, depression, incompetence, alienation, academic problems, family problems, school violence, delinquent behaviour, suicidal thoughts, suicide, mental health problems and drug abuse (Safana, 2016; Goodno, 2011; Smith, 2015; Okoth, 2014). For many cyber bullying affect their everyday lives and is a constant source of distress and worry. At school level, cyber bullying may make it difficult to maintain school operations, safety and academic achievement (Smith, 2015).

1.1 Contributing Factors

Review of literature identifies factors that could easily be attributable to cyber bullying in educational institutions. For instance, Smith (2015) attributes it to wide availability of digital technology and cyber platforms proliferation of technological innovations. These changes attracts large number of youths, thereby resulting or leading to issues of obsessive and addictive technological behaviours among students (Smith, 2015). Besides, Li (2015) observe that technology continues to develop rapidly and therefore changing people's ways of functionality in society. Further, internet, cell phone and other communication technologies provide us with

conveniences, but at the same time expose our students to interaction that put their safety and emotional well-being at risk (Li, 2010).

The other factor is the culture of self-expression that is propagated by social media platforms (Rachoe and Oyedemi, 2015). This culture empowers individuals to create, control and broadcast their own content. Social networking sites are particularly popular tools for the youths' self-expression practices (Rachoe and Oyedemi, 2015). Porter and his colleagues have identified smart phone proliferation as another factor that contributes to cyber bullying (Porter, Hampshire, Milner, Minthali, Robson, De Lannoy, Bango, Ngunguluza, Mashiri, Tanle and Abane, 2015). Smart phone proliferation have changed information communication technology (ICT) access for many African pupils and students (Porter, et al., 2015). Smart phones are now an essential tool for youths whether they are poor or rich, even in very remote rural areas. Also basic mobile phones are increasingly accessible to young people (Porter, et al., 2015).

Porter et al (2015) further, report that young people's use of mobile phones has expanded exponentially and dramatically in both urban and rural contexts across sub-Saharan Africa over the last decade. This has contributed to easy access to information and interaction with other people, which may result to cyber bullying and cyber crimes.

Al-Zahrain (2015) identifies anonymity as a factor for cyber bullying to target victim of any age. In such a situation and in a majority of the cases victims may not know who the perpetrators are (Grigg, 2012). All one needs is access the communication technology (Ngesu et al., 2013). Ngesu and his colleagues report that individuals who feel anonymous hide behind their phones and computers and attack their victims (Ngesu et al., 2013).

The other factor that contributes to cyber bullying is increased penetration of networked computers and mobile phones among young people. This has been noted to increase cyber bullying potential (Smith et al., 2008).

Other studies have identified frequent online use as a risk factor in relation to cyber bullying (Safana, 2016). This is supported by Smith and his colleagues who note that cyber bullying is associated with the use of internet (Smith, et al., 2008). They further argue that those students who use the internet more appear to be at greater risk of experiencing at least some cyber bullying (Smith et al., 2008). This gains support from Hinduja and Patchin, (2010) who comment that when teenagers spend large amount of time on the internet, potentials for misuse and harm can also increase. Wide expansion of internet use could make it easier for cyber bullies to target students who usually find it difficult to avoid (Al- Zahrain, 2015). A cyber bullying survey study conducted by Gross and Juvonen (2008) as cited in Al- Zahrain (2015) involving 1454 students drawn across the USA indicate a positive relationship between extensive use of the internet and cyber bullying.

1.2 Understanding Cyber Bullying and Its Manifestations

Understanding the meaning of cyber bullying is very important in relation to its manifestations and determining possible mitigations. Cyber bullying occurs when anyone uses technology deliberately and repeatedly to bully, harass, hassle and threaten someone (Smith, 2015). Cyber bullying is using technology such as internet or cell phone to deliberately insult, threaten or intimidate someone for instance, through a text or a call (Okoth, 2014). Smith (2015), adds, it involves the use of electronic media to inflict harm to someone intentionally and in more than one occasion. A number of definitions of cyber bullying abound and some have been considered in the current article. For instance, Belsey in Burton and Mutonguizo (2009: 1) defines cyber bullying, as "bullying which involves the use of information and communication technologies, such as e-mail, cell phone and text messages, instant messaging and defamatory online personal polling websites, to support deliberate, repeated and hostile behaviour by an individual or group that is intended to harm others". Also William in Burton and Mutonguizo (2009:1) defines cyber-bullying as "the use of speech that is defamatory, constituting bullying, harassment or discrimination and the disclosure of personal information that contains offensive, vulgar or derogatory comments". According to Kowalski, Giumeeti, Schroeder and Lattanner (2014) cyber bullying refers to the use of electronic communication technologies to bully others. Russell (2014) defines cyber bullying as "a behaviour that is repetitive, aggressive, hurtful and intended to cause harm by creating power imbalance". Cyber bullying can occur on blogs (interaction web journal), websites, in emails, list serves, chats, instant messaging and text/digital image messaging via mobile devices (Li, 2010).

Cyber bullying occurs through information exchange without physical contact between the offender and the offended (Gakil, 2017). Cyber bullying a kind of bullying that involves the use of mobiles and internet to pass aggressive information to other repetitively (Smith, et al., 2008). Rachoe and Oyedemi (2015) talk of the use of social media platforms to perpetuate aggressive behaviour towards others.

Based on the foregone discussions, any bullying can be classified as cyber bullying, if it involves online, digital or electronic devices to convey hateful, hurtful, harmful or aggressive message repeatedly with intention to cause harm to an individual or a group of individuals.

It is also important to consider or include a discussion of some terminologies used in the literature in relation to cyber bullying. These terms include cyber violence, cyber aggression, internet bullying, electronic bullying, internet harassment, digital bullying or online harassment (Popovac and Leoschut, 2012). All these terms refer to violence and aggression perpetuation through information technology. Also these terms refer to any discomfort or harm that intentionally and repeatedly inflicted on a specific person or group. These cruel acts may include the sending of harassing emails or instant messages, posting obscene insulting and slanderous messages online (Popovac and Leoschut, 2012).

Cyber bullying through mobile phones or online may take various forms, for instance sending malicious messages or text messages, messages of a sexual nature known as sexting or sending pictures or videos of someone with intention of distributing the content to others. In some situations individuals may impersonate others online or create false profiles with which to perpetuate cyber aggression (Popovac and Leoschut, 2012). Cyber bullying can be indirect or direct.

According to Li (2010: 373- 374), cyber bullying can take various forms:

- Flaming: sending angry, rude, vulgar messages directed to a person or persons privately or to an online group;
- Harassment: repeatedly sending a person offensive messages;
- Cyber- stalking: harassment that include threats of harm or is highly intimidating;
- Denigration (put-down: sending or posting harmful untrue or cruel statements about a person to other people;
- Masquerade: Pretending to be someone else and sending or posting material that makes that person look bad or places that person in a potential danger;
- Outing and trickery: sending or posting material about a person that contains sensitive, private or embarrassing information, including forwarding private messages or images. Engaging in tricks to solicit embarrassing information that is then made public;
- Exclusion: Acts that specifically exclude a person from an online group.

1.3 Prevalence and Characteristics

Patchin and Hinduja (2006) conducted an online survey involving 384 respondents who were younger than 18 years. The results indicate various forms of bullying occurred online including being ignored (60.4%), disrespected (30.0%), called names (29.9%), threatened (21.4%), picked on (19.8%), made fun of (19.3%) and having rumours spread about them (18.8%).

A study conducted on ownership and usage of mobile phones (all types) in three countries is illustrated on table 1 below. The countries involved include Ghana, Malawi and South Africa (Porter, et al. 2015).

Table 1. Showing ownership and usage of mobile phones (all types) among children approximately 9-18 years old, 2013/2014. N=3085

Country	Aspect	Male (%)	Female (%)
Ghana	Mobile owned	18.8	12.9
Ghana	Mobile Usage	45.0	37.2
Malawi	Mobile owned	10.4	6.2
Malawi	Mobile Usage	36.1	33.4
South Africa	Mobile owned	50.9	50.8
South Africa	Mobile Usage	77.4	77.1

Source: Porter et al. (2015: 26)

It is evident from table 1 above that the number of mobile phone users in all three countries was lower than mobile phone owners. Also the number of female mobile phone owners was lower than male owners in all the three countries, although in South Africa the difference is very small. The number of mobile phone users is quite high than ownership suggesting that the children may be either using family or relative mobile phone or borrowing from friends.

Also the high numbers of mobile phone users may be a contributing factor in cyber bullying related

incidences. This is supported by Hinduja and Patchin (2014: 3) who state that “cyber bullying is a growing problem because increasing numbers of kids are using and have completely embraced online interactivity”.

In Australia, bullying prevalence lies between 15 and 20 per cent, with reported cases of both bullies and bullying victims committing suicide or homicide (Okoth, 2014). In Korea a study in two middle schools, involving seventieth and eightieth grade students reported that 40 per cent of the respondents were involved in bullying with females victims most likely to have suicidal tendencies (Okoth, 2014). In Nigeria a study involving some students from Benin City indicate that almost 4 in every 5 of the respondents reported being bullied and bullying others (Aluede, 2011).

In the United States of America (USA), a study by the Pew Internet and American Life project indicate that 26% of the teens had been harassed through their mobile phones either by calls or messages (Okoth (2014). Also in the USA 93% of the youths accessing internet experienced anonymous cyberspace attacks, usually done by the perpetrators to demonstrate power and authority over subjects (Smith, 2015). In the United Kingdom (UK), surveys carried out involving adolescent indicate that 14- 23% admitted having sent offensive pornographic, abusive or threatening text using cell phone (Okoth, 2014).

1.4 Effects of Cyber Bullying

Review of literature reveals devastating effects of cyber bullying upon school children victims. For instance, Okoth (2014) observe that cyber bullying is brutal and causes social, physical and psychological effects on the victims. Also according to Ngesu and his colleagues, effects of cyber bullying in secondary schools are manifested in various ways and include absenteeism, violence, low self-esteem and poor academic performance (Ngesu, Gunga, Wachira, Munithi, K’Odhiambo, 2013). Okoth (2014) has also cited Low self-esteem and poor academic performance. Also leavers who are bullied view the school as unsafe and also experience increased risk of depression and high rate of drug abuse (Okoth, 2014). In addition, cyber bullying has also been described as a common form of aggression and violence that student engage in, in many schools (Okoth, 2014). Smith (2015) adds that low self- esteem tendencies tend to progress to adulthood. Studies have shown that some teenager students harassed by cyber bullies suffered depression, experienced education problems and some committed suicide (Smith, 2015). Also bullying in general can lead to feelings of incompetence, alienation and depression, among the victims (Smith, 2015). Other cyber bullying related effects include, low self-esteem, family problems, academic problems, school violence, delinquent behaviour and suicidal thoughts (Goodno, 2011). In the USA, for instance, several teenagers have committed suicide due to cyber bullying (Goodno, 2011).

Psychological problems associated with cyber bullying include increased social anxiety, low self-esteem, depression, wide ranging mental health problems, drug abuse, poor adjustment, aggression, suicidal ideation, increased emotional distress, likelihood of acting out and other somatic symptoms (Safana, 2016). Li (2010) identifies other psychological harm inflicted by cyber bullying and includes low-self-esteem, school failure, anger, anxiety, depression, school avoidance or absenteeism, school violence and suicide. Here Safana and Li report similar psychological effects in some aspects. Smith (2015) reports of tragic incidences associated with cyber bullying such as self-harm and suicide. Other effects identified by Russell (2014) include depression and helplessness, lack of social competence, tend to cry easily, having difficulties defending themselves from attack, low self- esteem and anxiety

Other studies have shown that cyber bullying victims exhibited decreased concentration, absenteeism and poor academic achievement (Beran and Li, 2007). Many other studies have identified an association between cyber bullying and emotional, social and academic difficulties (Beran and Li, 2006; Li, 2007; Patchin and Hinduja, 2010). Cyber bullying may also hinder the academic development of learners (Akbuht and Eristi, 2011; Tettegah, Befont and Tayber, 2006). Other consequences may include post-traumatic stress disorder, substance abuse, social and personal relationship problems (Tettegah, et al., 2006; Al-Zahrain, 2015).

Poor academic performance may be attributed to disruptions associated with mobile phone usage. Porter and his colleagues identify four factors that may link mobile usage, disruptions and academic performance, and include (Porter, et al., 2015):

- Disruption in adolescent sleep patterns associated with cheap night calls;
- Time lost through prolonged sessions on social network sites;
- Harassment and bullying;
- Increased widespread access to pornography.

There is a concern regarding time that young people spend on the internet and other social media platforms, and risks of addictive behaviours (Porter et al., 2015). Internet and mobile phone usage have become compulsive

among students resulting in students spending less time on their school work (Porter et al., 2015). Mobile phones were implicated for spreading cheap rumours that accelerated damage during the period of rampant unrest (Okoth, 2014).

1.5 Dealing with Cyber Bullying

Review of literature has demonstrated that cyber bullying is a serious phenomenon with devastating effect on school students who are connected to the internet and/or social media networks and platforms. The effects identified in the literature can be a great source of worry to the parents, educators and school administrators. It is therefore urgent that some firm steps or stands are taken to control this menace in order to protect school learners from the negative effects of cyber bullying.

Russell (2004) recommends that parents, school administrators and teacher can take the following steps to protect the learners from the effects of cyber bullying:

- Parents should make themselves available to speak with their children about school;
- Parents to monitor what their children are doing on the internet and any other technology;
- Parents should keep an open dialogue with the school in case they do believe there has been an issue with cyber bullying involving their children;
- School administrator and teacher should keep an open dialogue with students so that they feel safe in talking about the subject.

Smith (2015), making reference to South Africa, observes that, a firm stand is required to protect learners from the negative effects of cyber bullying. Raskanskas and Stoltz (2007) feel that a more practical strategy is to raise awareness among adults about the dangers of cyber bullying. They further recommend that cyber bullying should be included in school anti-bullying policies, anti-bullying materials and teacher training materials for anti-bullying work (Raskanskas and Stoltz, 2007). Besides, they recommend more specific intervention such as contacting mobile companies and internet service providers (Raskanskas and Stoltz, 2007).

Al-Zahrain (2015) talks of collaboration and educating parents, school personnel and citizens in the community about cyber bullying. Besides, the schools have a critical role to play in reducing and controlling cyber bullying through the process of raising awareness.

Hoff and Mitchell (2009: 662) offer what they describe as a ‘three-pronged approach’ for dealing with cyber bullying. The approach involves:

- Educating students and parents on the risks of virtual spaces and teach them the appropriate ways to protect students;
- Expanding schools approaches towards cyber bullying by teaching students how to deal with social tensions and problems;
- Addressing legal cases related to cyber bullying and discussing interventions and possible solutions through professional networks such as conferences and professional associations.

Kowalski et al. (2012) also provide a nine-element guide for students and parents on how to respond to cyber bullying:

- Save or print copies of nasty messages and websites as evidence;
- Ignore, delete or block the sender ;
- Report fake or offensive profiles to the site host;
- Investigate and monitor children’s online activities;
- Communicate with the school personnel and share evidence if the cyber bully is a student;
- Contact the cyber bully’s guardian and share evidence if he or she is known
- Seek legal advice if the cyber bully’s guardians are unresponsive;
- Report the cyber bully to the police;
- Seek help from a school counselor or other mental health professional, if your child expresses emotional problems.

Other ways may include, fighting back; turning-off computers or mobile phone or block messages or profiles; changing email address or mobile phone numbers; ignoring it; asking them to stop; keeping a record of nasty emails or messages and not responding to the threatening nasty email or other electronic messages.

In South Africa, some schools have set up committees to promote safe and responsible use of technologies in schools (Porter et al., 2015). Besides, students need to be taught the importance of making informed choices about behaviours in virtual environment or world (Porter, et al., 2015). However, it may be difficult for schools

to keep pace with the rapidly changing availability of phones and their expanding functionality (Porter, et al. 2015).

Another measure is discouraging use of mobile phones in schools, for instance in Kenya, the Ministry of Education has banned possession and use of mobile phones in public schools (Okoth, 2014). However, this could be viewed as a temporary measure, since a number of students are increasing using mobile phones as a teaching and learning resource (Porter et al., 2015).

2. Research Methodology

The study reported in this article was conducted to increase knowledge and understanding on cyber-bullying in Kenya's institutions of higher learning. The findings will contribute to building a knowledge base for understanding the prevalence, effects and mitigation strategies of cyber-bullying.

This study is a case study in which a descriptive research design was adopted. A purposive sampling strategy was employed in which one public university in Kenya was identified and selected for the study. Data was collected using a survey questionnaire which consisted of closed and opened ended items. This was necessary to diversify responses as well as reduce what Watson and Coombes (2009) as cited in Makori and Onderi (2013) describe as 'question fatigue'. The open-ended selection of the questionnaire offered respondents opportunity to make a comment, expand or clarify some information provided on their responses and thus assist the researchers and readers gain insights in their perspective on cyber-bullying in institutions of higher learning in Kenya. A total of 192 questionnaires were distributed to the six schools of the university and 123 of them were completed and returned (representing 64% response rate).

Resulting data from closed-ended items was analysed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). The open-ended items or sections of the items was analysed thematically and used to expand on the results of the closed-ended items. Of course some of them on their own generated very important information in relation to the objectives that this study set out to achieve.

It is also important to mention that ethical considerations have been observed in this study. For instance, attention has been paid to such areas as confidentiality, anonymity and minimisation of any harm to the respondents associated with this study.

3. Study Findings and Discussions

3.1 Background Information

- Gender: Male (54%; n=123) and Female (46%; n=123)
- Age interval: 16- 18 (20%; n=123); 19- 21 (59%; n=123) 22- 24 (15%; n=123) 28-31 (7%; n =123). Just fewer than 60% of the participants were within 19-21 age range.
- Residential status: Home (7%;n=123); On campus (34%;n=123) Rented hostel (51%; n=123) Stay with guardian (5%; n=123); No response (2%; n=123). Just over half of the respondents live in rented hostels.
- Respondents use various cyber platform (n=123): WhatsApp (24%); Facebook (16%); Tweeter (12%); IMO (4%); Messenger (14%) and No response (30%). The cyber platform that respondents use most is WhatsApp, followed by Facebook.
- As part of this investigation, respondents were asked what cyber bullying meant to them. A range of definitions emerged from the analysis and some of them include:
 - When some student bullies another student on the internet;
 - When you call another student names online;
 - When you use a student's cell phone to get them in trouble;
 - When you pretend to be another student online;
 - Abusing others on the social media e.g. internet;
 - When one uses another student's phone to text bad messages to someone;
 - Insulting people through the internet;
 - When you send mean messages or comments about other students online;
 - Sending a threatening message to another person;

The analysis indicates that the respondents have an understanding of what cyber bullying means.

3.2 Factors Contributing to Cyber Bullying in Educational Institutions

- Mode of accessing cyber platforms (n=123): Phone (54%) Tablet (34%) Laptop (10%) Cybercaf é(5%). Just over half of the students and just over one- third of the students access cyber platform using phones and tablets.
- 24% (n=123) indicate that the institution provided free access to internet connectivity.
- Less than two-thirds of them indicate that the institution allowed them free internet access for fewer than 5 hours a day.
- 56% (n=123) indicate that they received strange messages from people they do not know.
- 10% (n=123), indicate that they have received ‘name’ calling messages through the internet.

Based on these study findings, accessing various platforms and especially internet and phone can be a significant factor in cyber-bullying. The nature of the messages received includes:

- Threatening and spine tingling message
- Harassing message, for instance, as one participant put it “a text harassing me to pay a debt which I didn’t owe the person claiming “. (*sic*)
- Love message.

3.3 Cyber Bullying and Its Manifestations among Learners in Educational Institutions

3.3.1 Prevalence of Cyber Bullying in Educational Institutions

Table 2. Showing cyber-bullying prevalence

Statement (s)	Strongly Agree (n=123)	Agree (n=123)	Disagree (n=123)	Strongly disagree (n=123)	Not sure (n=123)	No Response (n=123)
It happens all the time	30%	32%	5%	5%	2%	32%
It happens too often, but not all the time	17%	29%	12%	2%	7%	32%
It happens sometimes	17%	37%	10%	5%	5%	27%
It hardly ever happen	7%	2%	7%	34%	10%	39%
It never happen	5%	2%	0	52%	10%	32%

Table 2 shows that cyber bullying is a common event in educational institutions. It occurs all the time. For instance, evidence indicates that 62% feel that cyber bullying occur all the time.

Table 3. Showing various manifestations of Cyber bullying

Statement	True (n=123)	False (n=123)
I don’t know what cyber bullying is	24%	76%
Cyber bullying is no big deal	10%	90%
Friends of mine have been cyber bullied	46%	54%
We’ve had cyber bullying incidents in my college	49%	51%
I have cyber bullied others	7%	93%
I have said nasty things to others online, but don’t consider it cyber-bullying	34%	66%
I have been cyber bullied by a close friend	27%	73%
I have had someone steal my password/cell phone and pretend to be me	34%	66%
I sent a joke to someone, but they thought it was cyber bullying	61%	39%
Others have said mean things to or about me online, but I don’t consider cyber bullying	39%	61%
	46%	54%

Some important things to note based on Table 3 above:

- Over three quarters of the respondents know what cyber bullying is all about.
- Cyber bullying manifests itself in various ways
- Respondents have either been cyber bullied or have cyber-bullied someone.
- Cyber bullying is a serious problem among the respondents.
- Close friends have been involved in cyber bullying activities to each other.

There is also evidence in the analysis indicating that the respondents' friend report of receiving bad or strange messages. For instance, one reports of a case where her friend was sent nude photos of someone and then the person (the attacker) pressurized her to send her nude ones in return. Others have reported of incidences receiving abusive and threatening messages.

3.4 Effects of Cyber Bullying among Learners in Educational Institutions

Table 4. Illustrating effects of Cyber bullying on the victims

Statement (s)	Strongly Agree (n=123)	Agree (n=123)	Disagree (n=123)	Strongly disagree (n=123)	Not sure (n=123)	No response (n=123)
They become embarrassed if other people find out what happened	46%	17%	5%	0%	12%	11%
Victims of cyber bullying feel bad because they are attacked as individuals	29%	32%	10%	0%	12%	25%
They have a strong feeling that no one can help	10%	27	24%	15%	15%	17%
They think that there is no way they can escape from cyber bullying	5%	17%	15%	20%	27%	32%
They feel they are alone with no support	15%	17%	15%	20%	9%	25%
They think that cyber bullying will not stop	20%	10%	10%	12%	27%	32%

It is evident from Table 4 above that the cyber bullying victims felt embarrassed and helpless.

Based on the comments made, it is evident that the experience of cyber-bullying was very traumatic and attacked people's self-esteem, among others. Others were frustrated, depressed, sad, bored and felt that their privacy was invaded. Yet others describe their experience as heartbreaking and demoralising; and a sign of rejection by the society. This is captured in some of the following comments reflecting how respondents felt:

- "Bored, frustrated and angry"
- "I felt that my self-esteem was lowered and even started hating myself."
- "I feel bad, like someone is invading my privacy." (*sic*)
- "I felt very bad to an extent of being depressed."
- "I felt looked down upon by my close friends."
- "I felt sad because the situation was difficult for me."
- "I felt rejected by the society."
- "I felt that everything is exposed."

It is not a pleasant experience to the victims, because it is characterised by anger, depression, frustration and a feeling of rejection, among others

3.4.1 Dealing with Cyber Bullying among Learners in Educational Institutions

Table 5. Strategies for dealing with cyber bullying

Statement (s)	Strongly Agree (n=123)	Agree (n=123)	Disagree (n=123)	Strongly disagree (n=123)	Not sure (n=123)	No response (n=123)
Cyber bullying would be illegal	51%	12%	5%	2%	10%	12%
Schools would have to help students who were cyber bullied	27%	34%	2%	2%	7%	32%
There would be a cyber bullying police squad to investigate cyber-bullying	39%	39%	2%	0%	24%	0%
Schools would teach parents how to help their children who are cyber bullied	34%	39	5%	0%	7%	22%
There would a youth helpline where students could go to get help	34%	22%	5%	0%	17%	22%
Schools would teach parents how to help their children who are cyber bullied	42%	27%	0%	0%	10%	22%
They would have to hold conferences for young people to help them solve the problem	34%	42%	0%	0%	5%	20%

Some of the suggestions made on how to deal with cyber bullying in our institutions based on Table 5, include:

- Holding conferences or sensitizing young people about cyber bullying;
- Educational institutions to teach their children regarding cyber bullying and its effects
- Perhaps having a body to investigate and deal with cyber bullying related issues;
- Educational institutions to devise strategies for dealing with cyber bullying related challenges.
- Educational institutions to collaborate with other organisation to set up tracking systems in order to identify, arrest and deal with cyber bullies.
- The government to institute heavy penalties to cyber bullies, in other words to put strict measures against people found cyber bullying.
- Institutions to appoint staff to handle cyber bullying affairs. One of his roles would be to sensitise students regarding the effect of cyber bullying and how best to minimise or mitigate its effects on individuals. The whole purpose of sensitization is to create awareness concerning cyber bullying. Students should be encouraged to report cyber-bullying related cases to the officer or staff in charge.
- Students to be discouraged from bullying their fellow students online.
- Provision of guidance and counseling to cyber bullying victims.
- Educational institutions to discourage free internet access on campus.
- Educational institutions to investigate reported cyber-bullying related issues and take appropriate action.

4. Discussion

The discussion in this section follows the five objectives that guided this study.

4.1 Understanding Cyber Bullying and Its Manifestations

Cyber bullying is a very interesting but harmful social media activity. It is interesting because even close friends have been involved in it. Friends sometimes send messages to each other not knowing that what they regard as joke messages are nasty to their friends. The cyber bullying messages are nasty and mean and hurt recipients. In

some incidences cyber attackers have sent images such as nude photos to the victims and demand that they also send their nude photos. Such activities fall in the realm of sexting within the cyber bullying activities.

4.2 Explore Contributing Factors in Educational Institutions

As it emerged from the current study, the key factor that contributes to cyber bullying is frequent access to various social media platforms. Evidence is clear that students who frequent various social media platforms and spent more time on them are more likely to experience cyber attacks. This is in line with the findings of previous studies, which associate cyber bullying attacks to factors such as: availability of digital technology, cyber platforms and proliferation of technological innovations (Li, 2015; Ngesu, et al., 2013; Al-Zahrain, 2015). These changes attract large number of youths resulting or leading to issues of obsessive and addictive technological behaviours among students. Past studies have also identified the culture of self-expression which allows individuals to create, control and broadcast their own content. There is also the element of easy accessibility of smart phone and basic phones to youths regardless of their socio- economic status (Al-Zahrain, 2015). Some of these tools can be accessed by even the poorest in the society and even in remote areas. Thus placing or predisposing the youths to cyber bullying activities some of which could be harmful to them in one way or the other.

4.3 Determine Prevalence of Cyber Bullying in Educational Institutions

Cyber bullying happens all the time whether we like it or not. In some situations it has been ignored a lot but the effect is devastating. Prevalence is captured in Table 2 in this document and it is evident that 62% of the respondents felt that cyber bullying incidents happen all the time. Such occurrence is associated with high number of mobile phone usage. For instance, in our study, majority of the victims happen to be phone users and therefore harmful messages were sent through their phones. This is because phones are easily accessible than perhaps other social media technologies (Al-Zahrain, 2015).

4.4 Examining the Effects of Cyber Bullying among Learners

The study findings indicate that the effect of cyber bullying is traumatic and has far reaching effects on the victims. For instance, respondents' report of victims experiencing declined self-esteem, frustration, depression and sadness, captured in Table 4 in the analysis section of this document. People also reported of a feeling of invasion of individuals' privacy and exposure to the entire world of their private life. Other victims also felt a sense of rejection by the society. They described their experience as heartbreaking and demoralising. Others felt rejected by the society as well as intrusion or invasion of their privacy. Majority of the effects reported border in the realm of psychology and therefore suggest that victims experience serious psychological effects. If the situation persists, the victims are likely to be affected in their studies leading to absenteeism and declined performance in their studies. Previous studies have also reported issues such as low self-esteem and depression in relation to cyber bullying. The effects identified in the study findings are in agreement with previous studies (Smith, 2015; Li, 2010; Russell, 2014) findings, for instance, depression, school failure, low self- esteem and anxiety among others.

4.5 Determine Ways of Dealing with Cyber Bullying among Learners in Educational Institutions

It is evident from this study that cyber bullying is a serious phenomenon affecting both secondary school and higher learning institutions students and therefore consideration of possible mitigation strategies is very important and necessary.

Some of the possible mitigations against cyber bullying activities in educational institutions may include:

- Sensitisation of both parents and students on cyber bullying and its effects on student victims. This suggests that education institutions should organise regular sensitization programmes because cyber bullying is a real problem with far-reaching consequences.
- Educational institutions to collaborate with the government and other security agencies in order to set up tracking systems that identify cyber attackers.
- The government to institute policies that address the issues and challenges associated with cyber bullying.
- Educational institutions to set up support systems for cyber victims through guidance and counseling services.

The above suggested measures or possible mitigation strategies are captured in Table 5 in the analysis section of this document.

The above mitigation measures are also reinforced by previous studies which emphasize parental involvement in

the life and activities of their children and especially in relation to cyber bullying. This calls for open and sincere dialogue between parents and their children as well as between parents and the school and/or university administration and staff. The underlying purpose of this is to ensure that their children are aware of the effects of cyber bullying activities and that they are all protected against such (Al-Zahrain, 2015).

5. Conclusions

This study has demonstrated that cyber bullying in educational institutions is real and has a devastating outcome upon the victims. It poses serious challenges to parents, educators and school administrators. It also undermines both school safety and academic achievements of the learners.

Some contributing factors have been captured in the current study and include the increased number of people using internet and social media platforms, ease access and widespread availability of smart phone and other web-enabled technologies, intensity and/or frequency of their usage, and obsessive and addictive behaviours of the learners. These factors have immensely contributed to growing interaction among young people thereby exposing them to potential cyber bullies.

The study has also captured effects associated with cyber bullying and includes absenteeism, school violence, high school drop-out rate, low self-esteem and poor academic performance. Others effects include depression, family problems delinquent behaviour, suicidal thought, suicide and social anxiety.

The study also offers ways of dealing with the cyber bullying menace both parents and educators to monitor kids during the time they are on the internet and other online technology; parents to make themselves available to speak with their kids about school; both parents to keep an open dialogue if they believe that there has been an issue with cyber bullying involving their children and creating awareness regarding the dangers of cyber bullying. There is also a need for sensitisation to create awareness and offering guidance and counseling support to cyber bullying victims. Also educational institutions in collaboration with schools can develop policies that can address cyber bullying and its associated challenges.

Recommendations

There is limited research on cyber bullying in sub-Saharan Africa and therefore recommend that:

- i) More research to be carried out on cyber-bullying in sub-Saharan Africa as there is limited research in the region
- ii) Schools to develop cyber bullying policies to protect school going children
- iii) Governments to educate poor communities who lack understanding on use of digital media.

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