

BEYOND BOOKS TO PASTORAL CARE: EXPANDING ROLES OF LIBRARIANS IN CHECKMATING CYBER BULLYING AMONG UNDERGRADUATES LIBRARY USERS IN ACADEMIC LIBRARIES

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Abstract

The advent of Information Communication Technology (ICT) has impacted greatly on the lives of people in our society. One of the evil consequences is cyber bullying which is harassing people online through different vices such as sending hurtful and insulting messages, posting humiliating videos and sharing ones' secret. This paper entitled " Beyond books to pastoral care: Expanding roles of librarians in checkmating cyber bullying among undergraduates library users in academic libraries" looked at the conceptual meaning of cyber bullying, its characteristics, effects, the roles of librarians in curbing the evil effect of cyber bullying among its victims, and recommendations to curb the evil.

Keywords: cyber bullying, social support, digital literacy, librarians, undergraduates.

INTRODUCTION

The revolution in Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has given birth to internet which now enables people to communicate easily with one another. This has great impacts on the lives of peoples as it affects every sphere of human life : health, work place, sports, education, tourism and agriculture(Fasola, &Adesehinwa, 2025). Its greatest impact is on communication. With some ICT devices such as android phone, tablet and computer together with the full compliments of internet connection and availability, people can now talk to each other, talk with each other and talk about one another (Ofufunso, et al., 2024). The social space of people has expanded so rapidly that our world today is now described as a global village. However, the inherent advantage of easy communication through the rampant

use of internet in this digital era comes with its attendant consequence called cyber bullying (Alrasheed, et al., 2022; Rusli, et al., 2024)

Cyber bullying is a “by product of the union of adolescent aggression and electronic communication.”(Spencer & Betts, 2018, p.4168). It is the bullying behaviour that occurs in cyberspace that enables an individual or group of persons to hurt, embarrass and humiliate someone. It is bully that is carried out online. The young generation of undergraduate age are internet savvy and do a lot with their electronic devices (Grimland et al., 2024) They not only use their phones very often, they sleep with it and go about with it even to their convenient places. Onditi (2023) reported that modern information and communication technology devices have become a way of growing up and now invariably has become an element of child development. The advent of smart phones and social media has moved young lives online and one of the consequences is cyber bullying (McVay& Santo, 2026)

Most academic libraries in Nigeria today deploy ICT infrastructures in provision of information resource to their teeming library users. As a consequence, the new generation of academic library users now have at their disposal internet facilities available in their libraries of their institutions for learning and research. Libraries, apart from providing learning and research materials, are now social hubs for interactions among undergraduates. Library users enter into social relationship among themselves through the intermediation of social media. They communicate among themselves through social means of e-mail, voice message and video calls where often they create, share and receive messages. There is now high prevalence of cyber bullying among youth as a result of their growing rate in use of internet and growing adoption of social media (Ajayi, et al.,2025;Kubayi, &Radebe, 2025)

Result from a work by Nwosu, et al., (2018) carried out to determine the incidence and awareness of cyber bullying at Nnamdi Azikiwe university showed that over 50% of the respondents were aware of cyber bullying in their schools and beyond. The work also revealed that the students admitted that they are at once perpetrators or victims. In their own research work on cyber bullying and academic achievement among adolescent in Aswan city, Mahmoud, et al (2022) showed that more than one quarter of the students studied were exposed to cyber bullying and that there was a significant relationship between cyber bullying and academic performance.

The resultant negative effects of cyber bullying are enormous and in some cases lead to suicide. Grimlandetal., (2024) reported that there is an association between cyber bullying and suicide attempt in both high income countries and middle-low income countries. Other identified notable effects include distress, depression, anxiety, truancy, loneliness, withdrawal, poor education performance and poor use of the library as some negative effects of cyber bullying behaviour.

Librarians, in course of their duties, intermingle with many undergraduate library users using the library. They do not only ensure steady internet connections and conducive learning environment in the library but also have a duty to monitor students' internet activity. Through pastoral care of organizing social supports for the bullies and the victims of cyber bullying, librarians can be of help. Hence, the main thrust of this paper, among others, is to discuss the conceptual meaning of cyber bullying, types, characteristics, effects of cyberbullying and the roles of librarians in checkmating cyber bullying among undergraduate library users.

Conceptual definition of cyber bullying

Cyber bullying has been defined in many ways and is attimes misconstrued to be traditional physical bullying. Cyber bullying is a bullying behaviour that occurs in cyberspace unlike physical bullying “which could be kick in the playground, widespread teases in hallways, or shoving when teachers were not around” (McVay& Santo, 2026 para. 1). However both traditional physical bullying and cyber bullying hurt and are emotionally disruptive. Physical bullying always establishes power imbalance between the victim and the bully while in the cyber bullying that occurs online, the bully remains anonymous as he/she is not physically seen. Both traditional physical bullying and cyber bullying hurt and are emotionally disruptive. While cyber bullying is carried out online, traditional physical bullying can be carried out physically, verbally or relationally. Verbal and relational bullying are carried out through rumours, gossips and witch-hunting (Phillips, 2014). This is common among women.

Cyber bullying is when someone repeatedly and intentionally harasses, mistreats, or makes fun of another person online while using cell phones or other electronic devices (Ofufunso, et al., 2023). This maltreatment is meant to malign a targeted person in other to bring he/she to a disrepute emotionally and psychologically. The person committing the act is called the perpetrator while the person at the receiving end is called the victim. The perpetrator is usually unknown as he/she goes on with a hidden identity. The victim is humiliated and is easily disposed to anger, distress and hopelessness which make him traumatized. Cyber bullying is the repetitive, intentional hurting of a person or group by another person or group using digital technology such as social media or the internet(Liu, 2024 as cited in Fasola&Adesehinwa, 2025).

“Cyber bullying is the intentional act of aggression carried out to harm another individual using electronics form of contacts or services” (Hellfeldt & Andershed 2019 as cited in Kumar & Goldstein, 2020). This activity is mediated by available social media networks. The perpetrators often use text messages, video messages posted in TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube to perfect their crimes. Often these messages are not only embarrassing but hurtful to the extent that it often leads to someone’s death.

Types of cyber bullying

Cyber bullying comes in various ways. Spencer and Betts, (2018); Cantone, et al., (2015); Kumar and Goldstein(2020) and Mahmoud, et al., (2022) mentioned some cyber bullying behaviours to include flaming, harassment, denigration, impersonation, outing, trickery, exclusion and cyber stalking. Flaming :This is where someone sends hurtful messages to a person with the intention to make the person sad or dejected; harassment stands for sending hurtful, mean and insulting messages to someone; denigration means spreading rumour to damage a person’s reputation; impersonation implies using pretentious names to send hurtful messages to somebody with the intension to get his victim in trouble or to out rightly damage the person’s name; outing is divulging a friend or somebody secret online with the malicious intent to bring the person to ridicule; trickery is luring someone to reveal secret information like one’s picture and proceeds to share it online for tarnishing of image; exclusion represents purposefully excluding somebody in a group he/she supposes to belong in an online platform and cyber stalking is incessantly spreading false information about someone with the intention to denigrate the person and create imaginary fears in him/her.

Documentary evidence notes that “sending threatening or abusive text messages, sending homophobic, racist or sexist material; creating and sharing embarrassing images or videos;

creating fake accounts, hijacking or stealing online identities to embarrass someone or cause trouble using their names” among others are rampant bullying activities among undergraduate students (Myers, &Cowie, 2017)

Cyber bullying acts take place usually through phone calls, chat andtext message (Nwosu, et al., 2018). It also occurs through instant messaging, social networking sites, chat rooms, blogs and gaming sites, short message sercice (SMS) multimedia messaging service and social networking sites such as My space andFace book (Irabor&Osebor, 2022)

Characteristics of cyber bullying

Cyber bullying has been identified with some characteristics that distinguish from physical form of bullying. These characteristics include anonymity, access, repetition, permanence, publicity, power and identity and motivation. Post from cyber bullying is usually anonymous goes (McVay& Santo, 2026: Phillip, 2014). That makes it dangerous and hides the identity of the perpetrator. The bullies/perpetrators can go on unpunished and this provides the greatest motivation for its continuity. The victim, most of the time,do not know who is ill treating him/her because the person can go on with strange names and can deploy many platforms for the cyber bullying activities. The anonymity of cyber bullying is a cause of concern

The cyber bullying message is often repeated severally and has no way of abating. This creates difficulty for the victim to bear. The repetitive nature of cyber bullying adds salt to the injury. It comes with the danger of successive and abusive attacks that often pushes the victim to suicidal ideation. It follows the victim everywhere he/she goes (McVay& Santo, 2026). Cyber bulling messages reach large audience as the bullies often deploy many platforms to send evil messages, video etc. Most of the time face books, What App and other special websites created

by the bullies are used to reach out to large audience of people. This put the victim into depression and unhealthy anxiety. It is said that the internet never forgets. This make cyber bullying posts remain permanence and can never be deleted easily from the internet. This particular characteristic of cyber bullying post hunts the victim perpetually and can easily dispose him/her to depression. From this permanence comes in the ever wider publicity attributed to cyber bullying. Also many platforms deployed for cyber bullying offers it wider publicity. All these attributes of cyber bullying make the victim feel isolated, depressed, emotional distress, anxiety and even unsafe wherever he/she goes.

Effects of cyber bullying

Cyber bullying has debilitating effect on its victims as it affects their psychological well being. As noted in their research work, cyber bullying has negative correlation with students' psychological well-being (Fasola&Adesehinwa, 2025). This implies that the more the students are bullied or bully in the cyberspace, the more it affects their healthy well-being. The authors noted that psychological well-being "is a person's ability to manage stress, maintain positive relationship and achieve a sense of purpose and fulfilment"p161. In a country like South Africa, Paruk&Nassen(2022) reported that depressive disorder, schizophrenia, attention deficit and hyperactivity are now regular disorder being investigated from mentally disrupted adolescent youths in hospitals suspected of cyber bullying. Kumar & Goldstein (2020) asserted that victims of cyber bullying sometimes complained of abdominal pains, depression, anxiety and sleeplessness and poor living. This invariably affects their academic performance. Students often withdraw from going to school because of thoughts of feeling unsafe. In a cross cultural research work of feeling of unsafe in schools environment, it has been attributed to, among other factors, incidences of bullying behaviours of their colleagues Mori et al (2022).

Their work shows that cyber bullying behaviours affect girls more than boys in their unsafe thought. This has increased the number of absenteeism in schools as reported in the research finding that electronic bullying was a causative factor to absence from school by students studied (Grinshteyn&Yang, 2017)

Constant exposures to cyber bullying posts comes with attendant emotional trauma that disrupt social relation, takes away sleep and affects concentration (Sleglova&Cerna, 2011 as cited in McVay& Santo 2026).The finding from a research work conducted by Ruslietal(2024), stated that Cyber bullying brings about increases in students anxiety. This leaves them poorly motivated thereby resulting in poor academic performance (Vaghchipawala, 2023).

Subaramaniam, et al., (2022) research work shows that victims of cyber bullying have reported loss of confidence, difficulty with decision making, lack of interest in school work, lack of interest in personal appearance, anxiety and depression, aggression, self harm and suicidal thought. Cyber bullying has made some of its victims vulnerable to suicidal thought (Kubayi, &Radebe, 2025). It was reported that a young girl of 18years old called Jessica committed suicide after her nude picture was shared by her boyfriend to students in about seven Ohio high schools (Subaramaniam, et al., 2022). Her picture was shared repeatedly in My Space by even strangers that were not known to her.

Tidy(2024), a Journalist with BBC, reported how sextortionists took the life of a young Nigerian named Jordan. Some scammers convinced and lured Jordan into exchange of nude images online which they later used for blackmailing. He was billed to pay some amount of pounds in order not to share the nude pictures to some of his colleagues and friendsonline. In spite of begging the sextortionists not to stop share the picture online otherwise he would kill himself, they refused to agree and Jordan killed himself.

In the same vein, Kim In-hyeok, a 28 years-old volleyball player in South Korea took his life after he could no longer bear barrages of hateful comments and rumours online about his sexuality and sensational appearance. Cho Jang-mi who was 28 years also suffered the same fate like that of Kim In-yeok. She killed herself because of hateful comments online (BBC, 2022). It is also reported that Michelle Carter was accused of manslaughter and was imprisoned due to the incessant malicious text messages she sent to her 18 years old boyfriend, Conrad Roy Jr., which led him to kill himself through carbon monoxide poisoning (Kumar & Goldstein, 2020)

Roles of librarians in curbing cyber bullying and Recommendations

The new digital library in place in our various academic libraries is a great enabler for internet connectivity and accessibility. This inevitably lures students to library where they use the internet on ends for research and learning. However, cyber bullying ensues as a result of rampant use of internet for information. With their phones, laptops and other electronic devices, they indulge in cyber bullying activities. Librarians as custodians of knowledge and curator of information have great role to play. Teacher librarian relates with these undergraduate students and bond with them and this is an opportunity for them to provide counselling and social support whenever they are victims of cyber bullying. Librarians who are very close to these undergraduates students most of the time can activate social support sources in order to reduce the incidents of cyber bullying. In his research work, Phillip (2014), established that librarians have the potential through pastoral care to bring about social support for victims of cyber bullying.

Findings from research work of Tektas and Kacmaz (2025) show that an increment in the level of social support leads to the decrease of cyber victimizations and also that the increment of

cyber victimizations leads to the increase of cyber bullying. Social supports could come in form of counselling, organizing workshop on good digital citizens, initiating institutional policies that provide psychological services to students, adequate health services, punishments for offenders of cyber bullying, moral education, orientations and etiquettes guiding social relations. Organised behavioural change intervention has been recommended as part of social support (Ajayi, et al., 2025). This can be led by librarian. Most of the victims of the cyber bullying either confide in their friends or nobody else. This has exacerbated the worsening situation of cyber bullying. They don't tell their parents because they are afraid of what would be their parent reactions or that their smart phones may be seized from them (Subaramaniam, et al., 2022). Librarian here becomes a choice bystander to help them out through counselling.

Alrasheed, et al.,(2022) in their research work advocated for an implementation of awareness programs among parents and educational institutions to fight against the menace of cyber bullying. Librarians should be in the forefronts of these campaign efforts in our higher institutions of learning. Librarians can, as well seize, an opportunity of parent teacher association platform to address parents on behavioural changes associated with cyber bullying victims. Librarian can take it to another level by creating a dedicated platform for parent with the sole intent for educating parents on the activities of cyber bullying (Kubayi&Radebe, 2025). This effort will assist the parent to detect easily when their wards are victims of cyber bullying. Librarians can organise workshop or orientation for students on responsible online behaviour. This orientation, as recommended by Ajayi et al.,(2025), could be packaged as “organized behavioural change communication” meant to help the youth to cope with the effects of cyberspace exposure Through this means, students will cultivate the virtue of

assertiveness, self empathy and self esteem that will restrict them from resorting to retaliation as a coping strategy for any perceived cyber bullying attack (Onditi, 2023).

Digital literacy, a subject that is taught by librarians in every higher institutions should be emphasised. Finding from a research work from Fasola & Adesehinwa(2025), shows that digital literacy has a positive correlation with the psychosocial well-being of undergraduate students. This is because students use their smart phone devices a lot and it affords them the opportunity to invest in social capital through intermittent interaction among their colleagues. This aligns with one of the recommendations from the research work of Rusli, et al., (2025) that digital safety should be taught to students. Aji & Yakubu (2023) revealed that cyber bullying, among others constitute cybercrime and mentioned that common sense approaches like 2 steps verification methods, never use the same password for more than one account should be taught to students for their digital safety.

Librarians, being at the forefront of the war against cyber bullying, should campaign for the introduction of moral education in our higher institutions curriculum. The moral education will inculcate in the students sound moral behaviour on how to relate among themselves and not to be moral burdens to one another through cyber bullying (Irabor & Osebor, 2022). The outcome of a survey on social and emotional skills (SSES) that x-rayed the pattern seen in students' social-emotional development, in their early adolescence of 10-15 years recommended for social emotional learning (SEL) in fostering academic success and well-being (OECD Education spotlight: Directorate for education and skills, 2025) The survey result argues that the SEL will enable the teachers and others engaged in children upbringing to plan and develop appropriate intervention and supportive environment in schools. Librarians as well as teachers, psychologist and school administrators can promote social emotional learning among

undergraduates in order for them to become socially and morally amenable. The undergraduate library users, through SEL, will transform greatly to responsible citizens who will shun cyber bullying activities.

To safeguard library users from cyber bullying, there is need for adequate users' data security policy. Yusufu and Awoyemi (2022, p.8) remarked that librarians, working synergic ally with other stakeholders, must ensure that robust regulations that will ensure users data policy are in place. According to them, "the library too should position itself to monitor and enforce regulatory compliance" Librarians and other library staff should never divulge private data of a library user to an unauthorized person or group. Libraries are crucial in promoting cyber ethics behaviours because they are often. As the gateway to digital resources and services, libraries are in the vantage position to promote cyber ethics behaviours among library users. (Wasike, 2013 as cited in Dunmade&Tella, 2023).

The students and librarians almost operate in the same social and environmental ecosystem and cyber bullying should be understood beyond printed messages to the social milieu people find themselves. Librarians should take cognisance of these cultural environments in order to come out with appropriate social supports for minimizing the incidence of cyber bullying.

Conclusion

The incidence of Cyber bullying which is spreading insulting messages to people online is awash among undergraduate students nowadays. The easy availability of mobile electronic devices and social platforms has made cyber bullying a difficult problem to easily do away with. Cyber bullying among other troubling issues has in some extreme cases led its victims to commit suicide. Librarians have immense roles to play in order to checkmate the ugly

incidence of cyber bullying. They undertake these roles through pastoral care of activating social supports to our undergraduates.

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