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## International Note: Awareness and context of cyber-harassment among secondary school students in Oyo state, Nigeria



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### ABSTRACT

We determined the awareness and context of cyber-harassment among secondary school students (653 survey respondents and 18 in-depth interviewees) in Oyo state, Nigeria. Respondents' mean age was  $14.2 \pm 2.2$  years and 53.9% were aware of cyber-harassment occurring in their school or among their friends. Cyber-harassment was often perpetrated via phone calls (62.5%), text messaging (36.9%), chat rooms (28.7%), through pictures or video clips sent via mobile phones (11.9%), emails (6.8%) or websites (5.9%). Cyber-harassment behaviours mentioned were the use of abusive words (25.4%), saying mean things or making fun of the victim (13.9%), solicitations for relationships (7.9%) or sex (6.8%) and spreading rumours about the victim (6.8%). In-depth interviewees recounted experiences of cyber-harassment suffered by their friends. Many were relationship-related, sexual solicitations and threats and corroborated quantitative findings. Respondents are aware of cyber-harassment occurring among students in the study area. Comprehensive interventions to address the problem need to be instituted. © 2014 The Foundation for Professionals in Services for Adolescents. Published by Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

### Introduction

Globally, access of adolescents and young persons to new media technology like cell phones and the internet is increasing (Lenhar & Madden, 2007; Lenhar, Madden, Smith, & Macgill, 2007). A disadvantage of this is the risk of harassment perpetrated via these technologies (Kowalski & Limber, 2007; Mishna, Cook, Gadalla, Daciuk, & Solomon, 2010; Ybarra, West, & Leaf, 2007). Literature on electronic-media perpetrated harassment in developing countries is sparse, however indications of increasing use of these technologies (Fox, 2011; ITU/UNCTAD, 2007) suggest that it could be a problem among our adolescents. This study sought to (i) determine if students were aware of electronic-media harassment and (ii) explore the context in which it occurs. Findings are part of a larger study on the incidence and effects of electronic media-related harassment among secondary school students in Oyo state, Nigeria.

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## Methods

A mixed methods approach (National Institutes of Health, 2001) which utilized an explanatory sequential design (Cresswell, 2001) was conducted. This design involves initial collection and analysis of quantitative data following which qualitative data is obtained to explain the quantitative findings (Cresswell, 2001). This design was appropriate for our study because the topic of interest, cyberbullying, is relatively new and we sought to explore the forms of cyberbullying behaviour and the contexts in which they occurred. We selected 653 students from secondary schools in rural (Igbo-Ora) and urban (Ibadan North) Local Government Areas (LGAs) in Oyo state by multi-stage sampling. Students were eligible if they had owned a cell phone and/or had access to the internet for at least six months prior to the study. Information was obtained via an interviewer-assisted electronic questionnaire. Following the quantitative phase, 18 (nine male and nine female) students who had been victims and/or perpetrators of cyberbullying or were aware of cyberbullying and who were willing to be part of the in-depth interviews were recruited. We described electronic-media harassment as a situation in which someone was a victim or perpetrator of one or a combination of the following actions carried out via cell phone (text message, phone call) or the internet. "A person or group of people: said mean and/or hurtful things; made fun of; called him or her mean and hurtful names; completely ignored or excluded him or her from a group; told lies or spread false rumours about him or her; sent mean notes/pictures/video clips; made unwanted sexual solicitations and other similar hurtful things" (Kowalski & Limber, 2007; Solberg & Olweus, 2003).

Our outcomes were:

1. Awareness of cyber-harassment (i.e. had students heard of/experienced harassment, via electronic-media in their school or among their circle of friends within three months of the study).
2. Pattern and context of harassment,
  - a. The type of electronic media used (internet, cell phone);
  - b. the method used (email, text message, phone call, instant messenger, chat room),
  - c. The specific behaviour (a rude statement, intimidation, threat, spreading rumours, sending of pictures or video clips etc).
  - d. The location: inside or outside school

Quantitative data were analyzed with SPSS version 20. The in-depth interviews were digitally recorded, transcribed and analyzed using ATLAS.ti software (Scientific Software, Berlin; version 7). Ethical approval was obtained from the University of Ibadan/University College Hospital Ethics Review Committee. Informed consent was obtained from the school principals and informed assent provided by each student.

## Results

More than half, 53.9% of the students were aware of electronic-media harassment (Tables 1 and 2). A higher proportion of students attending schools in the urban area, in senior classes and with daily and weekly internet access were aware of cyber-harassment (Table 1). Harassment was commonly perpetrated via phone calls (62.5%), and text messaging (36.9%) and in chat rooms (28.7%) (Table 2). Examples of behaviours mentioned were the use of abusive words (25.4%), saying mean/hurtful things or making fun of the victim (13.9%) (Table 3).

Findings from the in-depth interviews corroborated the quantitative findings. A 14 year old interviewee said,

*Yes, a friend of mine called me and she told me she was harassed. She told me that one day she was sleeping in class due to her ill health ... she had cough and catarrh and was breathing with her mouth and her mouth was opened. Then the guys in her class took a paper and then put it in her mouth like cigarette then they snapped her picture and posted it on different social networks. (female student)*

A 15 year old male student shared his friend's experience,

*Student: A friend of mine, my set mate just ..., this senior [student] just likes making troubles; he just started disturbing him, taking money from him, and sending text messages to him.*

*Interviewer: How did he [the bully] get this number?*

*Student: He seized his phone once or twice and he got his number through this, used up his credit [phone credit] and stuff like that just kept on threatening him and doing bad stuff to him. He had to report to his daddy ... IDI male student)*

Fifty-six percent of the students who participated in the questionnaire survey felt harassment perpetrated via electronic media had less of an effect on the victim than face-to-face bullying, 28.0% felt it had more of an effect, 1.7% the same effect while 14.1% did not know. About a third (34.9%) of students felt banning the use of electronic media in schools would reduce incidents of cyber-harassment, 62.9% said banning them in school would not help because perpetrators could use their phones secretly during and after school hours and 2.2% did not know if this would help or not.

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