

THE SOCIO-PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPACTS OF CYBERCRIME AMONG SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN IFO LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA, OGUN STATE

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Abstract

Cybercrime poses a growing threat to adolescents, especially secondary school students, who are active users of digital technologies yet often lack the awareness to safely navigate these online applications. This study examined the socio-psychological impacts of cybercrime among secondary school students in Ifo Local Government Area, Ogun State, Nigeria. A descriptive survey design was adopted, and data were collected from 393 out of the estimated 21000 students selected through a multi-stage sampling procedure from public and private schools. Five standardized questionnaires adapted from previous studies were used to measure five forms of cybercrime namely, cyberbullying, online harassment, online scams, exposure to inappropriate content and personal information compromise, alongside perceived social and psychological effects. The instrument demonstrated strong internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.87, 0.78, 0.83, 0.95$ and 0.86), four research questions were raised and answered in the study. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics with SPSS. Results revealed that although cybercrime behaviours were not pervasive, online harassment and misuse of personal information were relatively common ($x=0.25$) underscoring adolescents' digital vulnerability. Perceived social impact of internet usage was largely positive, with 80.1% of respondents reporting improved social interaction and 79.9% acknowledging its educational value. However, only 17.6% recognized a high psychological impact, reported strained family relationships (45.3%), cybercrime (33.3%) and internet addiction (29.0%). This suggests a disconnect between students' awareness of social versus psychological consequences of cybercrime. The study recommends, among others, parents be proactive and consistent in addressing adolescents' involvement in cybercrime. More awareness of the psychological toll of cybercrime and the integration of psychosocial support mechanisms into adolescent digital safety initiatives should be upheld by the respective policy makers.

Keywords: Socio-Psychological, Cybercrime, Adolescents, Secondary School Students

Introduction

The rapid spread of information and communication technologies (ICTs) has transformed social interaction, education and access to information in modern society. While digital innovations have improved learning opportunities and supported global connectivity, they have also created a space for the growth of cybercrime. Around the world, increasing dependence on digital platforms has raised concerns about the social and psychological impacts of cybercrime, especially among adolescents, who are some of the most active yet vulnerable users in cyberspace (Nguyen et al., 2023). Cybercrime encompasses unlawful activities conducted through computers, digital devices or computer networks, either as the medium or the primary target of the offence (Sarkar et al. 2023). As digital technologies advance, the complexity and sophistication of cybercrime evolve correspondingly, creating significant challenges for individuals, institutions and society as a whole. Secondary school students, who are often early adopters of emerging technologies, are increasingly vulnerable to a range of cyber-related offences. Cybercrime includes illegal activities carried out through computers and the internet, such as identity theft, phishing, hacking, cyberbullying, online fraud, and the spread of harmful content (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime UNODC, 2023; Holt et al., 2022; Livingstone et al., 2017).

Cyberbullying refers to repeated hostile behaviour executed via the internet, mobile devices, or other electronic media, such as sending threatening messages or disseminating false information (Smith et al., 2019). Identity theft involves unlawfully acquiring and using another person's personal information, typically for fraudulent or financial purposes (Hassan, 2025). Online harassment denotes deliberate, repetitive and unwanted conduct on digital platforms that induces fear, emotional distress, or harm to the victim (Huang, 2017). Personal information compromise entails unauthorized access, disclosure or misuse of private data, often leading to financial losses or violations of privacy (Smith & Johnson, 2020). Online scams on the other hand involve fraudulent schemes designed to deceive individuals into divulging sensitive information or transferring funds (Kumar & Singh, 2023). Exposure to inappropriate content, particularly among adolescents, includes interaction with violent or sexual material deemed unsuitable for their age group (World Health Organization, 2020). Cyberstalking is conceived as the persistent use of digital communication tools to intimidate, threaten, or harass an individual, thereby causing fear or psychological harm (Smith & Johnson, 2020). Online predators are individuals who deliberately use digital platforms to locate, manipulate, and exploit vulnerable or underage persons, frequently for sexual or otherwise malicious purposes (Williams & Brown, 2019).

The prevalence of cybercrime among secondary school students is a pressing global concern, and Nigeria is no exception. In this demographic, the phenomenon is particularly critical due to high levels of internet engagement. For instance, Omodara et al. (2020) reported that Nigerian adolescents spend an average of five to seven hours online daily, thereby increasing their exposure to cyber risks. This high level of digital engagement, compounded by inadequate awareness of online safety, renders students prime targets for cybercriminal activities. Adolescent developmental characteristics, such as risk-taking tendencies, combined with limited adult supervision, further exacerbate their susceptibility (Berson & Berson, 2005). Cyberbullying and online harassment, in particular, are highly prevalent; research by Olumide et al. (2016) in Southwestern Nigeria found that 39.9% of secondary school students had experienced cyberbullying. Similarly, Odora and Matoti (2015) reported that 67% of Nigerian secondary school students had encountered some form of cybercrime. Contributing factors to this vulnerability include insufficient digital literacy, peer influence, curiosity regarding new

technologies, inadequate parental guidance, and limited awareness of online threats (Kumar & Lee, 2018).

Adolescence is a key developmental period marked by identity development, increased sensitivity to peer interactions, and changing emotional regulation skills (Steinberg, 2020). Exposure to cybercrime, whether as victims, perpetrators, or bystanders, can interfere with these developmental processes, leading to negative socio-psychological effects. Socially, cybercrime can weaken trust, increase feelings of isolation, and put pressure on relationships (Martinez & Nguyen, 2021). Psychologically, it has been linked to higher levels of anxiety, depression, emotional distress, low self-esteem, and, in severe cases, suicidal thoughts (Kowalski et al., 2021; Alhaj et al., 2023). These effects may go beyond immediate emotional impact to affect academic success, behavioural adaptation, and long-term psychosocial health.

Statement of the Problem

The exponential growth of digital technologies has transformed educational experiences and enhanced global connectivity among secondary school students. However, alongside these benefits, this technological revolution has also heightened adolescents' exposure to cybercrime, presenting a complex and multidimensional challenge that warrants scholarly investigation. While the internet offers vast opportunities for learning, communication, and social engagement, it simultaneously provides fertile ground for malicious activities such as cyberbullying, online harassment, identity theft, personal data breaches, exposure to inappropriate content, and online scams. The psychological implications of cybercrime victimization among adolescents are particularly concerning. Existing studies indicate that victims of cyberbullying and online fraud frequently experience elevated levels of anxiety, depression, emotional distress, and social withdrawal, all of which can impede cognitive functioning and personal development. These psychological burdens often manifest in diminished academic performance, strained interpersonal relationships, and long-term challenges to emotional resilience. In particular, social withdrawal can significantly limit students' classroom participation, collaborative learning opportunities, and overall school engagement, with potential adverse effects on their future educational and social outcomes. Global evidence links cybercrime victimization among adolescents to adverse emotional states, reduced self-esteem, and deteriorating relationships with peers and family members (Kowalski et al., 2021; Alhaj et al., 2023). In Nigeria, factors such as widespread internet access, inadequate online safety education, and unsupervised usage heighten the risks (Olumide et al., 2016; Omodara et al., 2020). Despite the growing prevalence of these risks, there remains a notable scarcity of research addressing the socio-psychological consequences of cybercrime among secondary school students in Southwestern Nigeria, especially in semi-urban communities such as Ifo Local Government Area of Ogun State. This gap is critical, as the area's rapid urbanization, increasing rates of smartphone ownership, peer-driven digital engagement, and insufficient parental monitoring amplify students' vulnerability to online threats. Moreover, the combination of high internet usage and limited digital literacy further exacerbates the problem, making adolescents prime targets for cybercriminal activity.

Purpose of the Study

The main objective of the study examined the socio-psychological impacts of cybercrime among secondary school students in Ifo Local Government Area, Ogun State.

To actualize the objectives above, the study;

1. Identified the common types of cybercrime experienced by secondary school students in the study area.
2. Assessed the perceived social impacts of cybercrime on secondary school students in the study area.
3. Evaluated the perceived psychological impacts of cybercrime on secondary school students.
4. Explored socio-psychologically informed strategies for mitigating cybercrime among secondary school students.

Research Questions

1. What are the common types of cybercrime experienced by secondary school students in Ifo Local Government Area?
2. How does cybercrime affect the social relationships and interactions of secondary school students?
3. What are the psychological effects of cybercrime on secondary school students in the study area?
4. What socio-psychological strategies can be employed to mitigate cybercrime among secondary school students in Ifo Local Government Area?

Methodology

This study employed a descriptive survey design to investigate the socio-psychological impacts of cybercrime among secondary school students in Ifo Local Government Area, Ogun State, Nigeria. The area, a rapidly urbanizing semi-urban settlement with sixty-nine secondary schools and an estimated 21,000 students, provided a suitable context for exploring adolescents' engagement with digital technologies and related risks. A multi-stage sampling technique was adopted to selected 393 students of JSS2 to SS3 in public and private secondary schools in the area. Data were collected through a structured questionnaire adapted from existing validated instruments. Items covered five domains of cybercrime: cyberbullying (Hinduja & Patchin, 2013), online harassment (Kennedy & Melanie, 2010), online scams (Amosun & Ige, 2008), exposure to inappropriate content (Jonsson et al., 2019), and personal information compromise (Avais et al., 2014). Additional items measured perceived social and psychological impacts (Daninga et al., 2023). The instrument was reviewed for content validity, piloted with twenty-five students outside the study area, and yielded a Cronbach's alpha of 0.86, confirming reliability. Questionnaires were administered with official approval from the Zonal Education Office, and only students who consented participated. Data were coded and analyzed using SPSS, for descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, means and standard deviations) used to summarize responses.

Results

Research Question 1: What are the common types of cybercrime experienced by secondary school students in Ifo Local Government Area?

Table 1: Forms of Cybercrime

Forms of Cyber crime	No	Yes	Mean	SD	Ranking
Cyber bullying			0.23	0.42	
I posted mean or hurtful comments about someone online.	281 (71.5%)	112 (28.5%)	0.28	0.45	1st
I pretended to be someone else online and acted in a way that was mean or hurtful to them.	317 (80.7%)	76 (19.3%)	0.19	0.40	3rd
I spread rumours about someone online.	307 (78.1%)	86 (21.9%)	0.19	0.40	3rd
I posted a mean or hurtful video of someone online.	320 (81.4%)	73 (18.6%)	0.22	0.41	2nd
I threatened to hurt someone online.	319 (81.2%)	74 (18.8%)	0.19	0.39	4th
Online Harassment			0.25	0.43	
I have heard a verbal statement made to me online which I consider inappropriate due to their sexual nature.	258 (65.7%)	135 (34.3%)	0.19	0.39	3rd
I have sent unwanted materials of a sexual nature online.	317 (80.7%)	76 (19.3%)	0.34	0.48	1st
I have been repeatedly contacted online unwantedly by an individual.	282 (71.8%)	111 (28.2%)	0.19	0.40	3rd
I have been offended by crude sexual language when I chatted with a person known through the internet.	301 (76.6%)	92 (23.4%)	0.28	0.45	2nd
Online Scams			0.23	0.42	
I used another person's name and ATM card to obtain goods and services on the internet.	303 (77.1%)	90 (22.9%)	0.23	0.42	1st
I persuaded people to invest in a non-existent business on the internet.	316 (80.4%)	77 (19.6%)	0.23	0.42	1st

I bought products or goods on the internet without paying	303 (77.1%)	90 (22.9%)	0.23	0.42	1st
I persuaded people to invest a small amount of money with the promise of getting a larger amount on the internet.	312 (79.4%)	81 (20.6%)	0.20	0.40	2nd
Exposure to inappropriate contents			0.23	0.42	
I always looked for someone to sex chat with.	295 (75.1%)	98 (24.9%)	0.23	0.42	2nd
I watch pornography.	314 (79.9%)	79 (20.1%)	0.21	0.41	3rd
I post pornography online.	306 (77.9%)	87 (22.1%)	0.25	0.43	1st
Personal information compromise			0.25	0.43	
I allow others (friends/relatives) to use my personal information.	265 (67.4%)	128 (32.6%)	0.20	0.40	3rd
I share personal information/emotions with online friends/chat room partners whom I don't know in real life.	266 (67.7%)	127 (32.3%)	0.22	0.42	2nd
I use a nickname instead of my real name in my profiles.	199 (50.6%)	194 (49.4%)	0.33	0.47	1st
Weighted Mean			0.23	0.42	

The results in Table 1 shows that there are five major categories of cybercrime behaviours reported by respondents: cyberbullying, online harassment, online scams, exposure to inappropriate content, and personal information compromise. Overall, the weighted mean (0.23) and standard deviation (0.42) suggest that while these behaviours are present, they are not highly prevalent. Cyberbullying behaviours such as posting hurtful comments (28.5%), spreading rumours (21.9%), and sharing offensive videos (18.6%) reflect moderate engagement ($x = 0.22$, $SD = 0.41$). Online harassment shows higher prevalence, with 34.3% of respondents receiving sexually inappropriate remarks and 28.2% experiencing persistent unwanted contact ($x = 0.25$, $SD = 0.43$). Online scams recorded slightly lower engagement ($x = 0.22$, $SD = 0.41$), though notable proportions admitted to using another person's ATM card (22.9%) or promoting fraudulent schemes (19.6 to 22.9%). Exposure to inappropriate content was also common, with 24.9% engaging in sex chats, 20.1% viewing pornography, and 22.1% posting explicit material ($x = 0.23$, $SD = 0.42$). Personal information compromise showed the highest engagement, with 49.4% using false identities and one-third sharing personal details online ($x = 0.25$, $SD = 0.43$).

Research Question 2: How does cybercrime affect the social relationships and interactions of secondary school students?

Table 2: Perceived Social Impacts of Cybercrime

Social Impact	No	Yes	Mean	SD	Ranking	Decision
Internet has led to social interaction among secondary school students.	78 (19.9%)	315 (80.1%)	0.80	0.40	1st	High
It enhances effective communication with families.	85 (21.6%)	308 (78.4%)	0.78	0.41	3rd	High
It serves educational purposes.	79 (20.1%)	314 (79.9%)	0.80	0.40	1st	High
Internet helps the adoption of new lifestyles.	108 (27.5%)	285 (72.5%)	0.73	0.45	4th	Low
It leads to engagement in bad behaviour.	274 (69.7%)	119 (30.3%)	0.70	0.46	5th	Low
Weighted Mean			0.76	0.42		

Table 2 show respondents' perceptions of the social impacts of cybercrime. A large majority view the internet as socially and educationally beneficial: 80.1% reported enhanced social interaction and 79.9% identified its educational value ($x = 0.80$, $SD = 0.40$). Similarly, 78.4% agreed that it improves family communication ($x = 0.78$). These findings suggest that, despite cybercrime risks, students perceive the internet as a vital tool for connectivity and learning. Conversely, 72.5% acknowledged its influence on lifestyle changes, and 30.3% linked it to negative behaviours ($x = 0.70$, $SD = 0.46$). Nonetheless, the overall weighted mean (0.76) indicates that students regard the internet's social benefits as outweighing its potential harms.

Research Question 3: What are the psychological effects of cybercrime on secondary school students in the study area?

Table 3: Perceived Psychological Impacts of Cybercrime

Psychological Impact	No	Yes	Mean	SD	Ranking	Decision
Internet has led to social interaction among secondary school students.	215 (54.7%)	178 (45.3%)	0.45	0.50	5th	High
It enhances effective communication with families.	279 (70.9%)	114 (29.0%)	0.29	0.45	2nd	Low
It serves educational purposes.	284 (72.3%)	109 (27.7%)	0.28	0.45	1st	Low
Internet helps the adoption of new lifestyles.	262 (66.7%)	131 (33.3%)	0.33	0.47	4th	High
It leads to engagement in bad behaviour.	274 (69.7%)	119 (30.3%)	0.30	0.46	3rd	Low
Weighted Mean			0.33	0.47		

Table 3 shows students' perceptions of the psychological impacts of cybercrime, with strained family relationships emerging as the most acknowledged consequence (45.3%, $x = 0.45$). Cyberbullying followed, identified by 33.3% of respondents ($x = 0.33$), underscoring awareness of its emotional and interpersonal toll. Other effects, including internet addiction (29.0%), misuse of time (27.8%), and facilitation of cybercrime (30.3%), were less frequently reported, with means ranging from 0.28 to 0.30. The overall weighted mean of 0.33 suggests a moderate level of concern, indicating that while psychological risks are recognized, students perceive the social consequences of cybercrime as more pronounced than its internalized emotional effects.

Research Question 4: What socio-psychological strategies can be employed to mitigate cybercrime among secondary school students in Ifo Local Government Area?

Table 4: Socio-psychological Strategies to mitigate Cybercrime

Strategies	Frequency	Percent %
Parents should monitor and guide children's phone/internet use	156	39.7
Restrict or limit children's phone/internet access	52	13.2
Educate children on positive internet use	39	9.9
Government should regulate internet usage	32	8.1
Punish cybercrime involvement	27	6.9
General discipline, awareness, and behaviour improvement	87	22.1
Total	393	100

Table 4 shows respondents' perspectives on strategies for addressing the socio-psychological drivers of cybercrime. The most frequently recommended strategy was increased parental monitoring and guidance of children's phone and internet use, cited by 156 respondents (39.7%). This suggests that students regard family-level oversight as the most effective safeguard against risky online behaviours. The second most common recommendation, identified by 87 respondents (22.1%), emphasized the need for discipline, behavioural reorientation, and awareness campaigns. This reflects a belief that broader social and behavioural interventions can reduce adolescents' susceptibility to cybercrime. Other strategies were less widely endorsed but remain noteworthy. Approximately 52 respondents (13.2%) advocated for restricting or limiting children's internet access entirely, while 39 respondents (9.9%) recommended educating young people on safe and positive internet practices. Additionally, 32 respondents (8.1%) proposed stronger government regulation of internet use, and 27 respondents (6.9%) supported punitive measures against perpetrators of cybercrime as a deterrent.

Discussion of Findings

Cyberbullying was identified as the most prevalent form of cybercrime, with behaviours such as derogatory comments and the circulation of harmful videos ranking highest. This finding

aligns with global evidence that cyberbullying remains a widespread issue among adolescents, facilitated by the anonymity and immediacy of digital technologies (Kowalski et al., 2021; Smith et al., 2019). In the Nigerian context, studies show that extensive mobile phone use, combined with limited adult supervision, increases adolescents' vulnerability to online aggression (Olumide et al., 2016; Omodara et al., 2020). Online harassment also featured prominently, with reports of unsolicited sexually explicit messages and materials. Such experiences are consistent with Patchin and Hinduja's (2020) observation that online sexual harassment inflicts significant psychological harm and undermines adolescents' sense of safety.

Furthermore, exposure to sexually explicit content was widely reported, supporting earlier research which suggests that premature exposure can distort sexual attitudes, hinder healthy relationships, and affect self-concept development (Livingstone et al., 2017; World Health Organization, 2020). Beyond these, the findings highlight personal information compromise as a common risk behaviour, with many adolescents disclosing sensitive data online. Similar patterns have been noted in previous Nigerian studies, where limited awareness of digital risks reduces adolescents' ability to recognize and prevent fraudulent activities (Ogunleye et al., 2019; Adebayo et al., 2019). Peer influence and socio-economic pressures, particularly the lure of fast wealth, have also been identified as drivers of risky online engagement (Okoye, 2017). Importantly, low levels of digital literacy further heighten vulnerability to both victimization and perpetration, reinforcing the need for early and structured cyber safety education in schools (Oyewole & Adetunmbi, 2021).

The findings indicate that most students regard the internet as a valuable resource for enhancing social interaction, strengthening family communication, and supporting educational opportunities. Respondents also acknowledged its role in shaping new lifestyles, though relatively few associated internet use with deviant behaviour. This generally positive perception underscores the dual nature of digital technology, where benefits coexist with potential risks. Odora and Matoti (2015) argue that effective intervention strategies must account for this duality, while Akanle et al. (2016) observe that adolescents increasingly integrate the internet into their social lives, often overlooking its dangers. Similarly, Omodunbi et al. (2016) emphasize the importance of embedding cybersecurity education into school curricula to balance optimism with caution. These findings align with the "double-edged sword" perspective of adolescent internet use, which recognises that digital platforms can simultaneously promote constructive socialisation and facilitate antisocial behaviours, depending on supervision and user intent (Martinez & Nguyen, 2021; UNICEF, 2022).

The findings reveal relatively limited concern among students. While some respondents acknowledged that internet use can strain family relationships, foster cyberbullying, and contribute to internet addiction or poor time management, these effects were less widely recognized compared to the perceived social benefits. This gap suggests that adolescents may underestimate the emotional and mental health risks of unsafe online practices. Existing scholarship underscores these risks: Aboujaoude et al. (2015) demonstrated strong associations between cyber victimisation and adolescent anxiety and depression, while Eze et al. (2018) linked cybercrime exposure to behavioural maladjustment and diminished emotional well-being. Similarly, Kowalski et al. (2021) and Alhaj et al. (2023) reported heightened risks of social withdrawal and psychological distress among cyber-victimised adolescents. Long-term consequences, including trauma and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), have also been documented, particularly among teenagers repeatedly exposed to online harassment (Selkie et

al., 2020; Chen et al., 2018). Nigerian studies further highlight gendered patterns, showing that female adolescents are disproportionately vulnerable to emotional distress arising from cyber harassment (Ndubueze et al., 2017; Nwosu et al., 2021). Moreover, the significance of social support networks is reinforced by Wright (2017) and Kowalski et al. (2019), who argue that strong parental and peer involvement mitigates the adverse psychological effects of cybercrime. Collectively, these findings underscore the need for greater awareness of the psychological toll of cybercrime and the integration of psychosocial support mechanisms into adolescent digital safety initiatives.

The findings emphasised the importance of parental monitoring, behavioural regulation, and restricting unsupervised internet access. Such recommendations are supported by evidence indicating that parental mediation, comprehensive digital literacy education, and the implementation of enforceable online safety policies are effective measures for reducing adolescents' involvement in cybercrime (Nguyen et al., 2023; Livingstone et al., 2017). Taken together, these findings affirm the necessity of a multi-sectoral, context-specific intervention model involving parents, educators, policymakers, mental health professionals, and community stakeholders to mitigate the socio-psychological effects of cybercrime on adolescents in semi-urban Nigerian settings.

Conclusion

This study concluded that cybercrime-related activities, such as cyberbullying, online harassment, fraudulent practices, exposure to inappropriate digital content, and breaches of personal information, are common. However, particular forms, notably online harassment and the misuse of personal data, were found to be more common. Internet usage is beneficial but also has adverse effects. While the internet is a significant resource for communication, learning opportunities, and lifestyle enhancement, it's also contributing to the promotion of antisocial behaviours and strained family relationships.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, it is recommended that:

1. Parents should be proactive and consistent in addressing adolescents' involvement in cybercrime
2. Ministries of Education and school management should organize school-based educational programmes to constantly teach and remind students of the psychological toll of cybercrime.
3. More awareness on the integration of psychosocial support mechanisms into adolescent digital safety initiatives should be advocated.
4. Guidance counsellors and educators should be trained to identify and respond to subtle signs of cyber-related distress.

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