

Cyber Stalking Victimization among Undergraduate Students in Yobe State University, Damaturu-Nigeria

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Abstract

The study investigated cyber stalking victimization among undergraduate students in Yobe State University Damaturu, in order to explore the dynamics, patterns and factors as well as the impact of cyber stalking among undergraduate students. Cyber stalking is the use of internet or any electronic medium to stalk, harass and pursue victims. Cyber and mobile technologies have not only brought numerous benefits to society, they have also produced some harmful consequences for their users and society at large. One of these harmful effects is cyber stalking. A total of one hundred and thirty (130) respondents were selected through stratified and purposive sampling technique. The findings of the study revealed that majority of the respondents were internet active users and had experienced different kinds of cyber bullying. They also felt distressed after their cyberbullying experience. Also, the findings revealed that cybercrime awareness can be improved through radio and television jingles. The study recommended that cyber stalking awareness and prevention campaign should be taken to institutions of higher learning across the country to discouraged undergraduates from engaging in it.

Keywords: Cyber, Stalking, Student, Undergraduate and Victimization.

Introduction

The Internet has undergone rapid growth in this millennium in that it has promoted advances in every aspect of society and is accessible everywhere in the globe (Jaishankar, 2011). The Internet is primarily responsible for developing global commerce, promoting advancements in education and healthcare, and facilitating worldwide communication that was once perceived to be limited and costly (McFarlane & Bocij, 2005). However, the Internet, with its infinite size and previously unimaginable capabilities, has a dark side in that it has opened windows of previously unknown criminal opportunities that not only challenge, but also transcend all physical boundaries, borders, and limitations to detect, punish, and diminish an increasing social problem of global proportions (McFarlane & Bocij, 2005).

The advancement of science and technology in Nigeria has led to several internet assisted crimes which are committed in various forms such as identify theft, phishing, pornography piracy, desktop counter filling, hacking, internet chat room, cyber harassment, fraudulent, cyber bullying and electronic mail etc. Usually this crime is committed in form of sending fraudulent and financial proposal from cyber criminals to innocent internet users and internet naïve. The increasing rate of cybercrime in society is a strong threat to Nigerian's commercial growth and has given it wrong image internationally and consequently denied some innocent Nigeria certain opportunities abroad. Therefore, innocent internet users should inculcate the habit of continuously upgrading their knowledge about the ever changing nature of ICTs. Through this, they cannot only be well informed about the current trends in cybercrimes, but they will also have the knowledge about different forms of the said crime and how the cyber criminals carryout their heinous activities.

Thus, they can devise means of protecting their information from cyber criminals. Internet users should be security conscious (Jaishankar, 2008). The Internet has literally become a fertile breeding ground for an entirely new and unique type of criminal activity known as the cyber stalking. The cyber stalker is one who uses the Internet as a weapon or tool of sorts to prey upon, harass, threaten, and generate fear and trepidation in his or her victims through sophisticated stalking tactics.

Cyber stalking is a term often interchangeably used with the term stalking; although they share many similarities, when scrutinized critically, their differences are uncovered. In conjunction to the awareness that cyber stalking is becoming a recognized phenomenon (D'Ovidio & Doyle, 2003), this indistinctness gives rise to the requirement for cyber stalking to be studied as an independent offence (Bocij, 2004). Statistics indicate that the known incidents of cyber stalking range from 3.7 percent to 31 per cent of study participants in the few studies that have attempted to estimate its scope online (Reyns, 2010).

Cyber stalking is another form of internet assisted crimes such as cyber bullying, harassment, unwanted sending of text message, fraudulent phone calls etc, intentionally provoke an emotional response through online comments or post. All of these crimes are unwanted and may cause fear or distress to internet users or internet naïve. Cyber stalking is differentiated from trolling in that it is targeted towards a specific person or persons and from cyber harassment because it continues over a more prolonged period of time (Sheridan & Grant, 2007). Given the rapidly changing nature of technology, the types of behaviour that constitute cyber stalking will likely expand over time. To date, behaviours identified as cyber stalking include, but are not limited to: repeated unwanted emails or instant messages; posting false or hostile information about victims online; using social networking sites to harass the victim; subscribing to services or products in the victim's name, hacking into victim's personal accounts, online identity theft, impersonating the victim online, spamming or sending the victim computer viruses, and recruiting others to harass or threaten the victim via the internet (Whitty & Joinson, 2009). Cyber stalking entails (repeatedly) sending threats or false accusations via email or mobile phone, making threatening or false posts on websites, stealing a person's identity or data or spying and monitoring a person's computer and internet use. Sometimes the threats can escalate into physical spaces (Bocij, 2004). The purpose of this study is to explore the dynamics of cyber stalking victimization among undergraduate student in Yobe State University Damaturu, Nigeria.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on the routine activity theory which is based on the observations by Cohen and Felson (1979) pertaining to crime to a product of the recurrent, routine activities and structuring of everyday life. The theory suggests that victimization, much like the lifestyle exposure theory, is associated to the habitual activities that individuals engage in on a daily basis. These recurrent themes that take place, open doors to possible victimization. With reference to cyber stalking, individuals are at risk to victimization when they are regularly exposed to cyber technologies such as computers, internet, mobile phones, social networks and anonymous chat sites. This is because cyber stalking can only be committed with the involvement of cyber technology. When individuals engage in such activity, without the necessary precautions, they are made vulnerable to cyber stalking. In its original conception, the theory was designed to explain the volume and distribution of violent crimes or that of theft cases in which both the victim and offender are physically present at the scene of the crime (Tibbetts & Hemmens, 2010). Davis

(2011) adds that the occurrence of these components does not guarantee that a crime will be committed but rather enhance the likelihood that it may occur.

A motivated offender is considered to be any person who has a reason to commit a crime. Be it logical or not, the offender's motive is personally judicious and should be acted on. In cyber stalking, perpetrators are motivated by many diverse reasons such as rejection, obsession, and revenge or power (Mullen, 2009). These motivations compel the offender to engage in online stalking.

Although there are cases of cyber stalking victims that have been targeted for financial reasons; the symbolic aspect of a victim is often the cause for criminality. The offender finds value in harassing their victims. Visibility relates to the risk to be observed by potential criminals. In cyber stalking, this may not always be physically visible, but may have found shape in an online encounter such as in a chat room. Accessibility entails the ease with which an offender can approach a target without attracting suspicion or attention. Cyber stalkers are highly intelligent when it comes to cyber technologies and can thus easily find and approach their victims in order to exploit them, often remaining unidentified due to the anonymity of cyber space. Lastly, inertia refers to the ease with which a target can be acquired. Cyber stalkers can access information about their victims effortlessly due to factors such as careless disposal of personal details as well as the absence of protective software.

There are many forms of guardianship such as a police officer, security camera or an alarm system. The theory suggests that the presence of a capable guardian will prevent victimization but at the same time may displace crime. With regard to cyber stalking, guardianship may be in terms of protective software or responsible awareness of the dangers of cyber space to prevent possible victimization. It should, however, be noted that even these protective measures may contribute to crime techniques. Cyber stalkers use a variety of techniques. They may initially use the internet to identify and track their victims. They may then send unsolicited e-mail, including hate, obscene, or threatening mail. Live chat harassment abuses the victim directly or through electronic sabotage (for example, flooding the internet chat channel to disrupt the victim's conversation). With newsgroups, the cyber stalker can create postings about the victim or start rumours that spread through the bulletin board system. Cyber stalkers may also set up a web page on the victim with personal or fictitious information or solicitations to readers. Generally, the routine activity theory is commonly used to explain how the victims being involved in offending acts, it will be more relevant to guide the trends of this study.

Conceptual Clarification

Cyber Stalking

The term cyber stalking is a behaviour that take place in the cyber space through the use of internet and auxiliary devices in nonphysical jurisdiction in which information are exchanged and interactions take place with the internet users. Generally, cyber stalking is the use of the internet or cyber technology systems to stalk or harass an individual by repeatedly sending messages and threat of harm or intimidating behaviour. It is further defined as the use of the internet, e-mail or any other electronic communication system to follow someone or threaten them (Butler, 2010). The main disparity between stalking and cyber stalking stems from the methods of perusal occupied. Cyber stalking adheres to the repeated pursuit of a victim by exploiting various electronic communicative avenues. These online behaviours are facilitated by technological innovations that liberate potential stalkers of the spatial restriction of their recurring perusal

(Reyns, 2010). Stalking has been referred to as a gender-neutral crime; yet stalking cases generally involve female victims and male perpetrators (Bjerregaard, 2000). Mullen, Pathé and Purcell (2009) suggested that cyber stalking can function as a form of sexual intimidation. This stems from the notion that it potentially exposes the victims to sexual denigration, exploitation or subordination. Cyber stalking represents a new form of behaviour where technology is used to harass one or more individuals. Bocij (2004) defined Cyber Stalking as a group of behaviour in which an individual's or organization uses information and communication technology to harass another individual, group of individuals or organization. Such behaviour may include, but are not limited to, the transmission of threats and false accusations, damage to data or equipment, identity theft, data theft, computer monitoring, the solicitation of minors for sexual purposes and any form of aggression. Stalking is defined as a course of action that a reasonable person in possession of the same information, would think causes another reasonable person to suffer emotional distress.

Victimization

Victimization is the process of being victimized by the activities of other individuals in the society either directly or indirectly. However, victimization include the relationship between the victims and the offenders, the interaction between the victims and the criminal justice system such as the police, courts and correctional officials and the connections between victims and other social groups such as the media, businesses and social movement. Victimization may take different forms such as cyber victimization (i.e. cyber stalking and cyber bullying), violence victimization i.e. is rape, robbery as well as property victimization (e.g. vehicles theft, house breaking/burglary).

Types of cyber stalking.

Sellins and Wolf (1964) identified five types of crime victims which include:

- i. Primary victim: This refers to an individual who have been directly harmed by criminal act. The primary victim's bear the most devastating outcomes of the crime for examples, in homicide case, the victims is murdered, is the worst hit, as his or her life is lost.
- ii. Secondary victims: Is a person directly affected by the activities of other individuals (victimization) on a direct victim because of their relationship with him. For example, in the case of homicide, the secondary victims are the remaining family and friends of the victim, who are also victimized because their love one was murdered.
- iii. Tertiary victims: This refers to members of the community whose interests are directly or indirectly harmed by crime. In other words, this is when society as a whole become victims of crime. For example, when the contractor embezzle funds meant for the provision of electricity for a rural community, the entire communities who are thrown into darkness are tertiary victims of crime.
- iv. Mutual victims: this is when a criminal is retaliated against and eventually become a victim of him/herself. For example, when an armed robber rubs a supermarket cashiers and attempt to escape but get severely injured by the supermarket owner.
- v. No victimization: This refers to an individual affected by victimless crime. For example, individuals engage in prostitution and illegal drug use are the victims, their illegal activities as they personally suffer the harm resulting from such act.

Even though not so much information has been gathered by research into the behaviours allied with cyber stalking, a few common patterns have emerged (Bocij, 2004). The major themes associated with cyber stalking behaviour are as follows:

i. Sending recurring unwanted messages

The repetitive sending of unwanted messages is a common method used by cyber stalkers. It is often done with the use of e-mail services or social network sites in order to flood the victims' communicative systems. Victims are left feeling overwhelmed and unable to use their e-mail service effectively. This method is often resorted to by resentful stalkers who have high computer skills. These assailants may either be known or unknown to their victims. E-mail and social networks are the ideal medium for sending such messages as they are relatively cheap and convenient and they also afford the offenders the opportunity to conceal their identity by using unknown accounts and anonymous e-mailers (Mullen, 2009).

ii- Making threats

In most of cyber stalking cases, the cyber stalkers make threats against victims, their family or colleagues. Threats are usually made via e-mail or instant messaging. In some cases, the cyber stalker may use other methods such as facsimile, text messages or social networks. The victims may receive abusive and offensive messages on pornography attached (Bocij, 2004). The anonymity of this method allows the cyber stalker to make continuous threats and indulge in abuse and victimization (Pittaro, 2011).

iii- Spreading false accusations

Cyber stalkers may try to harm the reputation of their victims by posting false information about them. The cyber stalker may even go as far as contacting their victims' family or colleagues with the false information. They may also post false information about the victim on the internet or public portals. Attacks on another's credibility can range from malicious postings on a blog to the transmission of false claims on the internet (Mullen, 2009).

iv- Encouraging others to harass the victim

Many cyber stalkers will involve third parties in the harassment process. For instance, the cyber stalker may advertise the victim's contact details with a message suggesting sexual availability. This is a common form of harassment and victims usually report to receiving hundreds of telephone calls and messages in response to such advertisements. They may also engage in stalking-by-proxy in which they enlist the help of their family and friends, claiming that they have been wronged by the victim (Bocij, 2004).

v- Attacks on Data and Equipment

Cyber stalkers may also endeavour to damage a victim's computer system by infecting it with a virus or destructive programme. The motive here is to harm or destroy property belonging to the victim. This method of exploitation is practiced in order to cause the user distress (Mullen, 2009).

vi- Identity theft

This type of cyber stalking takes on many variations and can involve the ordering of goods and services on behalf of the victim or initiating contacts under the victim's identity in order to stress, humiliate or cause grief to the victim. This behaviour, associated with cyber stalking, is different to the traditional sense of identity theft as the motives are different.

Within the cyber stalking parameters, imposed distress on the victims is intended; whereas traditionally, identity theft is practiced for monetary gain (Mullen, 2009).

vii- **Arranging to meet the victim**

In more extreme case cyber stalkers are known to travel to meet with their victims. This, in turn exposes the victim to many dangers. Young people are particularly at risk as they are targeted by pedophiles and other predators (Bocij, 2004:15). While Mcfarlane and Bociji (2005) provide another classification for types of Cyber Stalking to includes, the vindictive cyber stalker, the composed cyber stalker, the intimate cyber stalker and collective cyber stalker. The above major themes associated with common cyber Stalking behaviors vary from one society to another. Therefore, for community such as university, the most common cyber stalking behavior is sending recurring messages.

Survey of Cyber Stalking Victimization among Students

United States Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics (2006) reported that about half of college students are stalking victims carried or owned something for protection for future victimization (e.g. mace and knife), and a large portion avoided campus as a precautionary measure. In the case of a fourteen-year-old student in Michigan, for instance, she pressed charges against her alleged rapist, which resulted in her being cyber stalked by fellow students. After her suicide in 2010, all charges were dropped against the man who allegedly raped her, on the basis that the only witness was dead. This is despite the fact that statutory rape charges could have been pressed. In a similar study, Buhi (2009) examined the subsequent help-seeking behaviours of female college student stalking victims and reported that approximately half of victims sought help from other. Few national studies have measured the extent and nature of stalking in the United States.

The Department of Justice Office on Violence against Women funded the 2006 Supplemental Victimization Survey (SVS) as a supplement to the National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS) to enhance empirical knowledge about stalking. The SVS, which represents the largest study of stalking conducted to date, incorporated elements contained in federal and state laws to construct a working definition of stalking. In contrast to the stability of stalking prevalence estimates, cyber stalking estimates show considerably more variation across studies. In another case of cyber stalking, a college student, Ravi was secretly filmed in his roommate sexual liaison with another man and posted it online. After the victim committed suicide, Ravi was convicted of bias intimidation, cyber stalking, and invasion of privacy in New Jersey. In 2012 he was sentence to thirty days in jail \$11,000 for restitution and three years of probation. Depending on the samples and behavioural operationalization used, prevalence estimates range from 1 to 40.8% in college students (Reyns, 2010). Survey of online harassment conducted by Finn (2004) found the prevalence rates for online harassment range from 10 to 15%, about half (46%) of all stalking victims experienced at least one unwanted contact per week. Many victims of stalking reported being stalked over a period of months or years, and 11% of victims said they had been stalked for 5 years or more. The fears and emotional distress that stalking engenders are many and varied. About 1 in 5 victims feared bodily harm to themselves, and 1 in 6 feared for the safety of a child or other family member. About 1 in 10 stalking victims feared being killed by the stalker victims who reported experiencing this behaviour. Thirty-one percent of stalking victims reported that the offenders showed up in places where they had no legitimate purpose being; approximately 10% of harassment victims reported this type of unwanted behaviour. Also, 29% of stalking victims stated that the offender waited in places for them, while 8% of harassment victims reported this type of behaviour. Adapted to on-line stalking situations, there are federal, state, and local criminal justice

agencies which have begun to stalking, and some have recently developed special task forces to deal with cyber stalking (Finn, 2004).

Materials and Methods

The study adopts a survey method to obtain the data required. The total populations of the study consist of all the undergraduates' students at Yobe State University, Damaturu. The structured questionnaire was used to collect primary data. In carrying out the study, one hundred and thirty (130) questionnaires were sent out to sampled students of Yobe State University, but only one hundred and twenty-one (121) questionnaires were validly completed and returned. A stratified and purposive sampling method was used to collect the data. Secondary data were obtained existing literatures such as textbooks, journals, published articles and websites. The quantitative data were analyzed using the statistical package for social sciences (SPSS). Also descriptive statistics such as frequency distribution tables, simple percentages, graph and chart were used, while the qualitative data were analyzed base on the study objectives.

Result of the Findings

Table 1: Repeatedly received unwanted sexual advance through phone or online

Repeatedly received unwanted sexual advance through phone or online	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	18	14.9
No	103	85.1
Total	121	100

Source: Field Survey, 2017

Table (1) shows whether the respondents have received unwanted sexual advances through phone or online, 85.1% of the respondents received unwanted sexual advances through phone or online, while 14.9% of the respondents were not receiving unwanted sexual advances through phone or online. Therefore, most of the respondents received unwanted sexual advances through phone or online.

Table 2: Repeatedly receiving unwanted phone call or text messages

Unwanted phone call or text message	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	29	23.9
No	92	76.1
Total	121	100

Source: Field Survey, 2017.

Table (2) shows whether the respondents have received unwanted phone calls or text messages, 76.1% of the respondents were not receiving unwanted phone calls or text messages while 23.9% of the respondents received unwanted phone calls or text messages. Therefore, most of the respondents were not receiving unwanted phone calls or text messages.

Table 3: Fallen victim of any of the incidents mentioned in table 9-13, through which medium you were victimized

Fallen victim no 9-13	Frequency	Percentage
Mobile phone	33	27.2
Online	38	31.4
Both	50	41.4
Total	121	100

Source: Field Survey, 2017.

Table 3 shows whether respondents have fall victim of cyber stalking in table 9-13, 27.2% of the respondents fell victim of cyber stalking through mobile phone, 31.4% of the respondents fell victim of cyber stalking through online while 41.4% of the respondents fell victim of cyber stalking through both mobile phone and online. Therefore, most of the respondents were victim of cyber stalking through both mobile phone and online.

Table 4: Hate speech can expose a person to harassment or intimidation online or on phone

Hate speech can cause harassment or intimidation	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	75	61.1
No	26	21.4
I don't know	20	16.5
Total	121	100

Source: Field Survey, 2017.

Table 4 shows that composite hate speech can expose a person to harassment or intimidation online or on phone, 69.1% of the respondents believed that composite hate speech can expose a person to harassments or intimidate online or on phone, 21.4% of the respondents believed that that composite hate speech cannot expose a person to harassments or intimidation online or on phone. While 16.5% of the respondents don't know whether that composite hate speech can expose a person to harassments or intimidation online or on phone. Therefore, most of the respondents believed that that composite hate speech can expose a person to harassments or intimidation online or on phone

Table 5: Public sharing/ disclosure of personal detail like phone numbers, email address or social media account details can expose a person to harass or intimidation online or on phone

Can public sharing/ disclosure of personal details	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	75	61.9
No	26	21.4
I don't know	20	16.5
Total	121	100

Source: Field Survey, 2017.

Table 5 shows that public sharing/disclosure of personal details like phone number, emailed address or social media account details can expose a person to harassment or intimidation online or on phone, 61.9% of the respondents believed that public sharing/disclosure of personal details like phone number, email address or social media account details can expose a person to

harassment or intimidation online or on phone, 21.4% of the respondents believed that that public sharing/disclosure of personal details like phone number, email address or social media account details cannot expose a person to harassment or intimidation online or on phone and 16.5% of the respondents have no choice whether that public sharing/disclosure of personal details like phone number, email address or social media account details can expose a person to harassment or intimidation online or on phone or not. Therefore, most of the respondents believed that that public sharing/disclosure of personal details like phone number, email address or social media account details can expose a person to harassment or intimidation online or on phone.

Table 6: Display of affluence such as posting of photo of exotic cars and expensive jewellery expose a person to cyber stalking victimization

Public sharing/ disclosure of personal details	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	94	77.6
No	16	13.2
I don't know	11	9.0
Total	121	100

Source: Field Survey 2017.

Table 6 shows that, display of affluences such as posting of exotic cars and expensive jewellery expose a person to cyber stalking victimization, 77.6% of the respondents believed that display of affluences such as posting of exotic cars and expensive jewellery expose a person to cyber stalking victimization, 13.2% of the respondents believed that display of affluences such as posting of exotic cars and expensive jewellery cannot expose a person to cyber stalking victimization while 9.0% of the respondents have no choice whether display of affluences such as posting of exotic cars and expensive jewellery expose a person to cyber stalking victimization. Therefore, most of the respondents believed that display of affluences such as posting of exotic cars and expensive jewellery expose a person to cyber stalking victimization.

Discussion of the Findings

The findings of the study revealed that most of the respondents were internet active users. This is in line with the study conducted by (Mullen, 2009) which found that repetitive sending of unwanted messages is a common method used by cyber stalkers. It's often done with the use of e-mail services or social network sites in order to flood the victim's communicative systems.

Based on the facts that predispose undergraduates to cyber stalking victimization in Yobe state university, the results reveals that the persons who spend too much time on the internet were more likely to be harassed, threatened, or intimidated online or on phone. The results have shown that majority of the respondents felt distressed after being harassed, threatened or intimidated on internet or phone. This is in line with the outcome of the study conducted by the Center for Disease Control sponsored by the national intimate partner and sexual the national intimate partner and sexual violence survey, which revealed that 16% of women and 5% of men had been stalked during their lifetime. For the possible solutions for cyber stalking victimization among undergraduate students. The study revealed that the majority of the respondents believed that Nigerian communication commission should be primary responsible for preventing cyber stalking victimization, which in line with the work of Ndubueze (2013) suggests that, the regulatory agencies should engage cyber-café managers fully in the implementation of the advance for fraud and other related offences act.

Conclusion

The study has examined cyber stalking victimization among undergraduate students in Yobe State University, Damaturu-Nigeria. Cyber stalking is a complex phenomenon with several harmful consequences. The undergraduate students in view of their active internet use are more prone to cyber stalking victimization than other groups in the general population. The study found that majority of the respondents had experienced different kinds of cyber stalking and were distressed by the experience. Nearly half of the respondents experienced post-traumatic stress disorder. Therefore, there is need for intervention by all stakeholders in the campaign against cyber stalking. Undergraduate students need to protect themselves against stalking and know how to deal with it. This can only be achieved through awareness campaign aimed at educating them on the risk factors associated with cyber stalking victimization and preventive measures. Moreover, institutions of higher learning through their guidance and counselling units should offer services that will help cyber stalking victims overcome the distress associated with their victimization.

Recommendations

Based on the result of the findings, the following recommendations are suggested;

- i. Cyber stalking awareness/prevention campaign should be taken to institutions of higher learning across the country to discourage undergraduates from involvement.
- ii. Institutions of higher learning should provide free counselling services to undergraduates who suffer distress/ post-traumatic stress disorder as a result of cyber stalking victimization to enable them recover quickly.
- iii. The internet services (ISPs) should monitor suspicious activities of individuals online and alert relevant law enforcement authorities.
- iv. The university management should organize public lectures on cyber stalking, where the experts will be invited to deliver lectures and interact with the students, this will help in the sensitization of the university community on the cyber stalking problem.
- v. The government should censor the use of the social media in the country; this will curb its abuse by deviant and criminal minded individuals.

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