# SOCIOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF CYBER AND NON-CYBER RELATED CRIMINAL BEHAVIOURS AMONG UNDERGRADUATES IN IMO STATE'S TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS

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**ABSTRACT:** The study was on the sociological analyses of cyber and non-cyber-related criminal behaviours among undergraduates in tertiary institutions in Imo State. The study was a survey adopting a correlational research design. Three research questions were posed for the study. The target population of the study was 55,000 undergraduates. The study sample was 598 students based on the data of students of tertiary Institutions in Imo State of Nigeria in the custody of central Police station Owerri. A pro forma titled: Criminal Behaviour as Related to Demography profiles of undergraduates in tertiary institutions of Imo State between 2013 and 2019 was used. The research questions were answered using mean scores and percentage ratings. Findings showed, among others, that cultism is the most common criminal behaviour among undergraduates. Children from families with high social backgrounds families mostly indulge in cyber and non-cyber-related criminal behaviours. It was then recommended, among others, that the government, through the Ministry of Education, should carry out serious awareness programmes on the dangers associated with cultism among undergraduates. Parents with high social backgrounds should create time to monitor the activities of their children and always admonish them when they try to go astray. It has been recommended that these tertiary institutions in Imo State and other parts of the country should accelerate campaigns targeted at cybercrime awareness among their students. This is from the vantage point of making them understand that cybercrime is a criminal offence punishable under the Nigerian criminal act with the attendant adverse consequence of jeopardizing their educational career if they are caught and convicted.

**Keywords:** Cyber, Non-cyber-related Crime, Criminal Behaviours, Undergraduates, Tertiary Institutions

## INTRODUCTION

Education is a process meant for the purpose of reformation of the students, for them to become responsible citizens. One of the good values of education is that it bequeaths good morals to the learners, hence the need for young people to get involved in it. Hierarchically, tertiary education is the highest stage in the order of levels of education. Much is, therefore, expected from those who undergo the process of this apex level of education. As a matter of fact, discipline and moral life should be the trend of behaviour for those who undergo this process of education. Conversely, cybercrimes and non-cyber related criminal behaviours seem to have eaten deep into the fabrics of the undergraduates of the contemporary period. News about cyber and non-cyber related criminal behaviours seem to have become the order of the day.

Cyber-related crime or internet crime can be defined as the use of a computer as an instrument to facilitate illegal ends, such as committing fraud, child trafficking, pornography, intellectual property stealing and violating privacy. Cyber-related crime, primarily through the internet, has grown in importance as the computer has become central to education, commerce, entertainment, and government (Dennis, 2019). The Internet has been the revolutionary invention of the 20th century. It successfully shrunk the world into a much smaller place by bringing the citizens and nations closer together in terms of enhanced communication and prompt exchange of ideas and information (Saroha, 2014). Keeping aside its advantages, the internet has also raised numerous security concerns, which found a place in the highest levels of official and governmental discourses. Such crimes threaten a nation's security and financial health. The issues surrounding these types of crimes have become high-profile cases around the world (Tanwar, 2016). In Nigeria, cybercrimes seem to be perpetrated by people of all ages, ranging from young to old, but in most recent instances, the young seem to be the worst offenders. Akpan (2016) reported that cybercrime has put Nigerian students on a serious quest for money rather than the real deal of getting a university education (Nwosu, Adebawojo & Ayeni, 2017; Adegbola & Fadara, 2022; Balogun, Abdulrahaman & Aka, 2024).

On the other hand, non-cyber-related crimes are the other worrying patterns of criminal behaviour that cause sleepless nights to people in society. These include involvement in armed robbery, disregard to constituted authority, rape, examination malpractice, stealing, receiving stolen property, unlawful possession of firearms, kidnapping and impersonation that permeate the fabric of the society.  Undergraduates seem to have, ever than before, been associated with heinous crimes, according to Mwiraria, Ngetich and Mwaeke (2024).

Crime according to Obot (2010), is an act harmful not only to some individuals but also to an institution, society or the state. Criminal acts are forbidden and punishable by law. Enakpoya (2019), define crime as an unlawful- act that is punishable by a state. Dastile (2018) notes that what is precisely a criminal offence is defined by the criminal law of each country. Many countries have a catalogue of crimes called the criminal code. It is the state (government) of a particular country that has the power to restrict one's liberty for committing a crime. Adedokun (2015) opined that in modern societies, there are procedures to which investigations and trials must adhere. If found guilty, an offender may be sentenced to a form of reparation such as a community sentence, imprisonment or in some jurisdictions, execution. The researcher defines crime as a violation of norms, values and laws of the land, which could attract various degrees of punishment.

Babalola and Odu (2009), in addition to Garba (2023), outlined categories of crime as forgery, impersonation, cheating, unlawful possession of firearms, peddling harmful drugs, offences against public morals and public policy, rape, robbery, examination malpractice, stealing, receiving stolen property and kidnapping. Previous studies such as Dastile (2018) have suggested some of the crimes that seem to be prevalent among students include: armed robbery, rape, unlawful possession of firearms, receiving stolen properties and cultism (Enakponye, Adedesho & Kali 2016). However, little attention has been devoted to factors such as gender and socio-economic background of students involved in these crimes.

The role of gender in cyber and non-cyber-related criminal behaviours in our universities seems to be a matter of serious concern.  Misi (2015), reported that receiving stolen property by any means is as bad as the crime itself. Female undergraduates, according to Dastile (2018), have

been reported to be involved in buying and receiving gifts and stolen properties from armed robbers. Statistical records from Nigeria police force Owerri (2017) revealed that weapons used in these robbery operations are sophisticated and could not have been bought by these young undergraduates.

Regarding socioeconomic background, previous studies from Akogwe and Okon (2017) suggest that most students involved in criminal acts are from well-to-do parents who undoubtedly give them much money, which is misused in purchasing sophisticated weapons. A contrasting report came from the story of Akogwu (2015) who reports that poverty is a major reason why male undergraduates join cyber-related crimes, robbery gangs and cults (Balogun et al., 2019).

This study is guided by the strain theory, propounded by an American Socioologist, Robert K. Merton, in 1948. The theory states that most people have similar aspirations, but they don't all have the same opportunities or abilities. When people fail to achieve society's expectations through approved means such as hard work and delayed gratification, they may attempt to achieve success through other means (Akpan, 2016; Adanma, 2017; Amini-Philips, 2018).

Relating this theory to the present study, it entails students who indulge in these cyber and non-cyber-related crimes might be doing so due to some disappointing experiences they have had in their efforts in society. Empirically, Okafor (2017) carried out a study on the gender prevalence of cybercrimes and robbery cases in tertiary institutions in Imo State. The study found that these crimes were carried out in campuses and surrounding communities, where male students mostly live. Iwuala (2017) found out that cultism was at a high rate among undergraduates. Onete, Akpama, Egong and Okey (2018) observed that children from families with high social backgrounds families mostly indulge in the illegal possession of firearms. Ekiadolo (2017) carried out a study on the gender prevalence of child trafficking among undergraduates in Benin City, Edo State. It was observed that child trafficking was prevalent among females. Again, Marina and Ugwumba (2016) conducted a study on the percentage involvement of students in cyber and non-cybercrimes among students in tertiary institutions in Lagos State. Findings revealed a preponderance of students in cultism. Among all the empirical studies reviewed, none focused on cyber and non-cyber-related criminal behaviours among undergraduates in tertiary institutions in Imo State, Nigeria. That is therefore, the gap which the present study intends to fill. In applying the Strain Theory (Akindipe & Akilla, 2024), it needs to be pointed out that analysing cyber and non-cyber-related criminal behaviours among undergraduates in tertiary institutions involves understanding various sociological factors that influence these behaviours like peer influence, economic factors, technological proficiency and anonymity for cyber-related criminal behaviours (Odumesi, 2014; Muraina & Muraina, 2015; Taiwo & Igebkoyi, 2019) or substance abuse, family background, social learning and economic hardship for the case of non-cyber related criminal behaviours (Idom and Tormusa, 2016; Andeme Bikoro, Fosso Wamba & Kala Kamdjoug, 2018); Igba, Igba, Nwambam, Nnamani, Egbe, & Ogodo,2018).

**Statement of the Problem**

Previous researchers have identified crimes committed in Nigerian universities as cyber and non-cyber-related. Updates on trends, gender and socio-economic background of undergraduates involved in these criminal activities are, however, obscure. Statistical records

from law enforcement agents involved in maintaining law and order on campus and the larger society on the prevailing circumstances in relation to crimes committed in universities are equally obscure. Records and statistical representations are very important for university authorities and the government to plan strategies for curbing criminal activities in universities. Questions that could be addressed by any intervention programme aimed at curbing criminal activities in university are the rate of crime and nature of crime, gender of culprits and socio-economic background of culprits. With this information, authorities can plan adequately on possible ways of tackling criminal activities in tertiary institutions in Nigeria.

This study seeks to examine the prevalence of cyber and non-cybercriminal behaviours among undergraduates in Imo State of Nigeria from 2013 to 2019, focusing on the influence of gender and socio-economic background.

## Scope of the Study

The study was limited to criminal activities among undergraduates in tertiary institutions in Imo State. Other issues that were investigated were the gender and socio-economic background of the culprits. The institutions examined in Imo State include, Alvan Ikoku Federal of Education Owerri, formerly called Alvan Ikoku Federal College of Education (AIFCE), Federal University of Technology Owerri, Imo State University Owerri and Imo State Polytechnic Umuagwo. The Federal University of Technology is located within the state capital. Alvan Ikoku Federal College of Education is located in the state capital. Imo State Polytechnic is the only state-owned polytechnic, and it is also located in the Owerri education zone.

## Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate cyber and non-cyber-related criminal activities among undergraduates in tertiary institutions in Imo State. Specifically, the study sought to:

1. ascertain the percentage of cyber and non-cyber-related crimes committed in tertiary institutions in Imo State;
2. investigate the socio-economic backgrounds of students involved in cyber and non-cyber-related crime in tertiary institutions; and,
3. examine gender differences in cyber and non-cyber-related crimes committed in tertiary institutions.

## Research Questions

The following research questions were posed to guide the study.

1. What are the percentage representations of cyber and non-cyber-related criminal behaviours in tertiary institutions in Imo State?
2. What are the socio-economic backgrounds of students involved in cyber and non-cyber-related crime in tertiary institutions in Imo State?
3. What are the gender differences in the cyber and non-cyber-related crimes committed in tertiary institutions in Imo State?

## METHOD

The study was a survey adopting Correlational Research design. The target population of the study was 55,000 undergraduates (to cover an approximate number of the students in all the tertiary institutions in Imo State). There are four tertiary institutions in Imo State namely: Imo State University with a population of 14,005 students (student Affairs office, Imo State University 2020). Federal University of Technology, Owerri with a population of 21,005 (Administrative office, Federal University of Technology Owerri 2020) Alvan Ikoku Federal College of Education Owerri with a population of 15,000 (Administrative office AIFCE 2019), 5000 students from Imo State Polytechnic Umuagwo. (Source: Administrative office, IPU, 2020). The sample of the study was 598 students in custody of central police station post in Owerri Imo State capital and security post record of Imo State University, Federal University of Science and Technology, Federal Polytechnic Nekede, Alvan Ikoku Federal College of Education and Imo State Polytechnic Umuagwo. A proforma titled: Criminal behaviour as related to demography profiles of undergraduates in tertiary institution of Imo State between 2013 and 2019 was used. The proforma contained fifteen items that guided the research questions such as; rate and frequency of occurrence of crimes, gender of offenders in custody and socio-economic status (SES) of parents. The stated item questions were answered by the commissioner of Police Imo State and School Security Operatives at the security post of each institution selected for the study. The proforma attached with the purpose of the study and research questions were sent to specialists for validation. The instrument was face validated by five specialists, three specialists were from the department of Educational Foundation and Guidance Counselling while three specialists from department of measurement and Evaluation were used in the validation exercise. Corrections made were affected on the final copy of the proforma administered at the security post and to the police commissioner.

The researcher used tertiary institutions in Abia State to determine the reliability of the instrument. Abia state university, college of Education Technical Arochukwu, University Agriculture Umudike and Abia State Polytechnic were used. Crime rates in the above-mentioned tertiary institutions were collected using a rating scale titled Crime rate in tertiary institutions in Abia State Rating Scale. The reliability of the instrument was calculated using one shot method hence analysing data collected using Cronbach Alpha Statistics. The reliability of the instrument was found to be 0.79, the internal consistency was found to be 0.81 which meant that it was internally consistent. Records and reports from the Central Police Office Owerri, Imo State Security post, Federal University of Technology Security post Owerri, Alvan Ikoku Federal University of Education Security Post and Imo State Polytechnic Umuagwo Security post for crimes involving undergraduates from the four selected institutions were used for this study. The researcher used face to face method in order to collect the data for the study. The research questions were answered using mean scores, percentage rating. The accepted mean scores for which acceptance response was given is 2.5, and above whereas 2.4 and below had a rejection response.

**RESULTS**

Analysis of Data for Answering Research Question 1

**Table 1: Percentage and mean score of cyber and non-cyber-related crimes committed from 2013-2019**

| S/N | Nature of Crime | N | 2013 | 2014 | 2015 | 2016 | 2017 | 2018 | 2019 | X̄ | % |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Internet fraud | 42 | 6 | 4 | 6 | 5 | 7 | 8 | 6 | 6.0 | 11.9 |
| 2 | Identity fraud | 14 | 2 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 3 | 4 | 1 | 2.0 | 3.9 |
| 3 | Theft of card payment data | 29 | 3 | 3 | 6 | 4 | 8 | 3 | 2 | 4.1 | 8 |
| 4 | Cryptojacking | 20 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 2 | 2.9 | 5.5 |
| 5 | Cyberespionage | 32 | 6 | 5 | 3 | 5 | 3 | 6 | 4 | 4.5. | 8.8 |
| 6 | Armed robbery | 32 | 4 | 4 | 5 | 5 | 4 | 4 | 6 | 8.00 | 8.8 |
| 7 | Cultism | 71 | 7 | 16 | 11 | 9 | 8 | 9 | 11 | 10.1 | 19.5 |
| 8 | Abortion | 23 | - | 3 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 3.3 | 6.3 |
| 9 | Examination malpractice | 84 | 9 | 13 | 15 | 9 | 9 | 15 | 14 | 12 | 23.1 |
| 10 | Kidnapping | 16 | - | 5 | 2 | 2 | 4 | 1 | 2 | 2.2 | 4.5.0 |

*Source: Central police station report, Owerri (2015)*

From Table 1internet fraud had a mean score of 6.0 (11.9%) in relation to the total crime committed, identity fraud had 3.9% and a mean score of 2 in relation to the total crime committed, theft of card payment had a percentage of 8 and mean of 4.1, cryptojacking had a percentage of 5.5 and mean of 2.9, cyberespionage had percentage of 8.8 and a mean score of 4.5, armed robbery had a percentage of 8.8 and mean score 8, cultism had a percentage of 19.5 and a mean score of 10.1, abortion had a percentage of 6.3 and 3.3 mean scores, examination malpractice had a percentage of 23.1 and a mean score of 12 and kidnapping had a percentage of 4.5 and a mean score of 2.2.

Research Question 2 What are the socio-economic backgrounds of students involved in cyber and non-cyber-related crimes in tertiary institutions in Imo State?

Socioeconomic background of students involved in cyber and non-cyber related crimes in tertiary institutions in Imo State.

**Table 2: Data on students and internet-related frauds**

| S/N | Nature of Crime | 2013 | 2014 | 2015 | 2016 | 2017 | 2018 | 2019 | N | X̄ | % | SES |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Internet fraud | 6 | 4 | 6 | 5 | 7 | 8 | 6 | 42 | 6 | 11.9 | Low-income |
| 2 | Identity fraud | 2 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 3 | 4 | 1 | 14 | 2 | 3.9 | Low-income |
| 3 | Theft of card payment data | 3 | 3 | 6 | 4 | 8 | 3 | 2 | 29 | 4.1 | 8 | High-income |
| 4 | Cryptojacking | 2 | 3 | 4 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 2 | 20 | 2.9 | 5.5 | High income |
| 5 | Cyberespionage | 6 | 5 | 3 | 5 | 3 | 6 | 4 | 32 | 4.5 | 8.8 | Low-income |
| 6 | Armed robbery | 4 | 4 | 5 | 5 | 4 | 4 | 6 | 32 | 8 | 8.8 | High-income |
| 7 | Cultism | 7 | 16 | 11 | 9 | 8 | 9 | 11 | 71 | 10.1 | 19.5 | High-income |
| 8 | Abortion | - | 3 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 23 | 3.3 | 6.3 | Low-income |
| 9 | Examination malpractice | 9 | 13 | 15 | 9 | 9 | 15 | 14 | 84 | 12 | 23.1 | High-income |
| 10 | Kidnapping | - | 5 | 2 | 2 | 4 | 1 | 2 | 16 | 2.2 | 4.5 | High-income |

*Source: Central Police Station Report Owerri (2015)*

From Table 2 above, students involved in internet fraud cases from 2013 to 2019 were from low-income families, identity fraud 14 in number from 2013 to 2019 were children of low-income group, theft of card payment data culprits were children of high-income group, cryptojacking are children of high-income group, cyberespionage were identified to be children of low-income group, armed robbery eventually were identified to be from high-income group, cultism was identified to be from the high-income group, abortion was identified to be from low-income group, examination malpractice culprits were from high-income group, and kidnapping culprits were eventually from high-income group.

Analysis of Data for Answering Research Question 3

What are the gender differences between cyber and non-cyber-related crimes committed in tertiary institutions in Imo State?

**Table 3: Gender difference in cyber and non-cyber related crimes committed in tertiary institutions in Imo State**

| S/N | Nature of Crime | 2013 | 2014 | 2015 | 2016 | 2017 | 2018 | 2019 | N | $\bar{X}$ | % | Gender M | F |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Internet fraud | 6 | 4 | 6 | 5 | 7 | 8 | 6 | 42 | 6 | 11.9 | 42 | - |
| 2 | Identity fraud | 2 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 3 | 4 | 1 | 14 | 2 | 3.9 | 14 | - |
| 3 | Theft of card payment data | 3 | 3 | 6 | 4 | 8 | 3 | 2 | 29 | 4.1 | 8 | 29 | - |
| 4 | Cryptojacking | 2 | 3 | 4 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 2 | 20 | 2.9 | 5.5 | 13 | 7 |
| 5 | Cyberespionage | 6 | 5 | 3 | 5 | 3 | 6 | 4 | 32 | 4.5 | 8.8 | 20 | 12 |
| 6 | Armed robbery | 4 | 4 | 5 | 5 | 4 | 4 | 6 | 32 | 8 | 8.8 | 23 | 9 |
| 7 | Cultism | 7 | 16 | 11 | 9 | 8 | 9 | 11 | 71 | 10.1 | 19.5 | 59 | 12 |
| 8 | Abortion | - | 3 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 23 | 3.3 | 6.3 | - | 23 |
| 9 | Examination malpractice | 9 | 13 | 15 | 9 | 9 | 15 | 14 | 84 | 12 | 23.1 | 50 | 34 |
| 10 | Kidnapping | - | 5 | 2 | 2 | 4 | 1 | 2 | 16 | 2.2 | 4.5 | 14 | 2 |
| | | | | | | | | | 363 | | | 264 | 99 |

*Source: Central police station report Owerri (2015)*

**Table 4: Percentage involvement of male and female students in cyber and non-cyber related crime from 2013-2019**

| | Male % | Female % |
|---|---|---|
| Internet fraud | 100 | - |
| Identity fraud | 100 | - |
| Theft of card payment data | 100 | - |
| Cryptojacking | 65 | 35 |
| Cyberespionage | 62.3 | 37.5 |
| Armed robbery | 71.9 | 28.1 |
| Cultism | 83.1 | 16.9 |
| Abortion | - | 100 |
| Examination malpractice | 59.3 | 40.7 |
| Kidnapping | 87.5 | 12.5 |

*Source: Central police station report Owerri (2015)*

From Table 3 above, there is a definitive gender difference in internet fraud cases because only male students were involved in it; 100% of males were also involved in identity fraud cases, and 100% of males were involved in theft of card payment data. In cryptojacking, there was a gender difference of 65% male against 35% female; in cyberespionage, there was a gender difference of 62.5% male against 37.5% female; armed robbery difference was 71.9% males against 28.1% females. The difference in cultism cases was 83.1% males against 16.9% females. There was no difference in abortion cases because it had 100% female involvement. In the examination, the malpractice case had 59.3% males against 40.7% females involved, while the kidnapping case had 87.5% males against 12.5% females involved.

## DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

### Percentage representations of cyber and non-cyber related criminal behaviours in tertiary institutions from 2013 to 2019

The findings of this study, as shown in Table 1, reveal that among all the cyber and non-cybercrimes that occurred between 2013 and 2019, cultism had the highest percentage and mean score. The meaning of this finding is that students in tertiary institutions in Imo State, from the police reports and school security reports, were involved in all these crimes, with the highest percentage of them involved in cultism. The reason for this result could be due to the failure of parents to train their wards very well, an inordinate quest for material things, bad friends, the proliferation of arms through politicians who buy them during elections to attack opponents and the search for security which seems to be mostly the reason why students are involved in cultism. This finding agrees with the finding of Iwuala (2017) that cultism was at a high rate among undergraduates. It can, therefore, be concluded that cultism is the most common criminal behaviour among undergraduates.

### Socio-economic background of students involved in cyber and non-cyber related crimes in tertiary institutions from 2013 to 2019

Again, the result in Table 2 proved that among all the students who were involved in all the stated crimes, a greater number were from the high-income group. This has corroborated the finding of Onete, Akpama, Egong and Okey (2018), which revealed that children from families with high social backgrounds families mostly indulge in the illegal possession of firearms. Based on these findings, it is therefore possible to conclude that children from high social background families mostly indulge in cyber and non-cyber related criminal behaviours (Akpan, 2016; Adanma, 2017; Amini-Philips, 2018).

### Gender differences in cyber and non-cyber related crimes committed in tertiary institutions

Moreover, finding of this study as shown in table 3 revealed that except in abortion case, there is male preponderance in most of the cyber and non-cyber related criminal behaviours in the tertiary institutions. This finding equally supports the finding of Okeshola (2013), Marina and Ugwumba (2016) whose study revealed that males were more involved in examination malpractices. It can therefore be said that there is male preponderance in both cyber and non-cyber related criminal behaviours of the undergraduates.

**Conclusion**

This paper x-rayed the sociological analyses of cyber and non-cyber-related criminal behaviours among undergraduates in tertiary institutions in Imo State and concludes that cultism is the most occurring criminal behaviour of undergraduates, children from high social background families mostly indulge in cyber and non-cyber-related criminal behaviours and there is male preponderance in both cyber and non-cyber related criminal behaviours of the undergraduates.

**Recommendations**

Based on the findings of this study, the researcher recommends the following:

1. The government, through the Ministry of Education, should carry out serious awareness programmes among undergraduates on the dangers associated with cultism.
2. Parents with a high social background should make time to monitor their children's activities and always admonish them when they try to go astray.
3. Parents should pay more attention to their male children to ensure that they are not getting involved in any cyber or non-cyber-related criminal behaviours and admonish the females against immoral behaviours that can lead to abortion.
4. It is recommended that these tertiary institutions in Imo State and other parts of the country should accelerate campaigns targeted at cybercrime awareness among their students. This is from the vantage point of making them understand that cybercrime is a criminal offence punishable under the Nigerian criminal act with the attendant adverse consequence of jeopardising their educational career if they are caught and convicted.

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