"BEYOND STEREOTYPES": INVESTIGATING THE ROLES AND MOTIVATIONS OF GIRLS IN CYBERCRIMINAL NETWORKS IN IBADAN METROPOLIS, OYO STATE, NIGERIA.

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ABSTRACT: *This study investigates the involvement of girls in cybercriminal networks within Ibadan Metropolis, Oyo State, Nigeria. It examines their roles, motivations, and the socio-economic implications. The study is anchored on the Structural Strain and Sex Role theories. Utilizing an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design of the quantitative and qualitative data collection procedure, the respondents were purposively sampled. Findings of the research revealed that although girls' participation in cybercrime is relatively lower compared to boys, their roles are nonetheless significant and multifaceted, encompassing activities such as romance scams, phishing, online fraud, identity theft, and cyber-enabled financial crimes. Additionally, girls provide psychological support to their male counterparts, often engaging in domestic chores and serving as "sex tools," which facilitates the smooth operation of these networks. The findings indicate that motivations for girls' involvement in cybercrime include economic vulnerability, peer influence, poverty, access to Western education and technology, and the anonymity of the internet. The socio-economic implications were discovered to be profound, disrupting educational paths of girls, inflicting psychological damage, and perpetuating cycles of poverty and social instability. The study concludes that cybercriminal networks have devastating consequences on girls and thus, it was proposed that targeted interventions focusing on education, mental health support, and socio-economic empowerment are crucial in mitigating the risks and providing alternative pathways for at-risk girls.*

KEYWORDS: Cybercrime, Girls, Stereotypes, Networks.

INTRODUCTION

In the digital age, cybercrime has emerged as one of the most pressing challenges facing global societies. Defined as criminal activities that involve the use of computers and networks, cybercrime encompasses a broad range of illicit activities, including hacking, identity theft, financial fraud, and the spread of malware. As technology continues to evolve, so do the methods and sophistication of cybercriminals, making cybercrime a constantly shifting and increasingly complex phenomenon to address. Cybercrime poses significant threats not only to individuals and businesses but also to national security and economic stability. The global cost of cybercrime is estimated to reach trillions of dollars annually, reflecting the profound economic impact of these activities. Moreover, the pervasive nature of cyber threats, which transcend geographical boundaries and legal jurisdictions, complicates efforts to combat and prevent these crimes. Among other countries across the globe, cybercrimes have indeed become a significant social issue in Nigeria, manifesting in various forms and impacting both individuals and institutions. The term "cybercrime" encompasses a broad range of illegal activities that involve the use of computer technology as a tool, target, or platform (Moulton, 2010)

The Internet Crime Report (2023) highlights a concerning surge in cybercrime, with significant increases in both the frequency and financial impact of various cybercrimes. Investment fraud emerged as the costliest type of crime tracked by IC3, with losses escalating from \$3.31 billion in 2022 to \$4.57 billion in 2023, marking a 38% increase. This sharp rise underscores the growing sophistication and reach of investment scams. The 2023 IC3 report indicates that cybercriminals are increasingly adept at exploiting both technological vulnerabilities and human psychology. The notable rise in investment fraud and ransomware highlights the evolving nature of cyber threats. Investment fraud's significant financial impact suggests that perpetrators are effectively exploiting market uncertainties and financial insecurities, particularly targeting middle-aged individuals who might be more actively involved in financial planning and investment. Similarly, the increase in ransomware incidents and the associated financial losses illustrate how cybercriminals are not only refining their methods but also diversifying their tactics to maximize impact. Nigeria is known for its significant presence in global cybercrime activities, often linked to economic challenges, high unemployment rates, and the allure of quick financial gain. The inaugural World Cybercrime Index, produced by researchers from the University of Oxford and the University of New South Wales, Canberra, provides a comprehensive analysis of the global landscape of cybercrime ranking Nigeria as 5th in Global Cybercrime Index.

In Nigeria, there exists a widespread misconception that cybercrime, predominantly associated with 'yahoo boys', is exclusively perpetrated by male individuals. However, this narrow perception often overlooks the substantial roles that girls play in enabling and supporting these criminal activities. While 'yahoo boys' may garner significant attention in discussions surrounding cybercrime, it is essential to examine the multifaceted nature of this issue and the diverse actors involved, including females who contribute to its perpetuation through various means, as recent trends suggest a noticeable participation of females, including young girls, in these illicit activities. While several studies have explored the broader landscape of cybercrime in Nigeria, there is still a paucity of research focusing specifically on female involvement and their roles in cybercrime. This study seeks to explore the under-researched area of Nigerian girls' participation in cybercriminal activities, aiming to understand their roles, motivations and the dynamics of their involvement.

Research Objectives

The broad objective of the study is to investigate the roles of girls in cybercriminal activities in Ibadan Metropolis, Oyo State Nigeria, while specific objectives are to:

i.   verify the claims of girls' involvement in cybercriminal networks in Ibadan Metropolis, Oyo State;

ii.   investigate the roles of girls in cybercriminal activities in Ibadan Metropolis, Oyo State;

iii.   examine the motivations of girls in cybercriminal activities in the study area; and

iv.   interrogate the socio-economic implications of girls' involvement in Cybercriminal activities in Ibadan Metropolis, Oyo State Nigeria.

Research Questions

The following questions guided the study.

i.   Are girls in Ibadan Metropolis involved in cybercriminal networks?

ii.   What roles do girls in Ibadan Metropolis play in cybercriminal activities?

iii.   What are the motivating factors for girls' involvement in cybercriminal activities in Ibadan Metropolis?

iv.   What are the socio-economic implications of girls' involvement in cybercriminal networks in Ibadan Metropolis?

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Concept of Cybercrime

Cybercrime includes a variety of activities that exploit computers and the internet for fraudulent purposes. These activities range from identity theft to money laundering, using diverse strategies to target victims (Halder & Jaishankar, 2011). According to Das and Nayak (2013), cybercrime is committed primarily by individuals or organized groups using computers or computer networks as tools, targets, or platforms for criminal activity. It includes a wide range of actions, from electronic cracking to denial-of-service attacks. In a similar perspective,

Okeshola (2013) posited that the term 'cybercrime' encompasses any criminal activity involving the use of computers or internet networks, including offenses such as fraud, theft, blackmail, forgery, and embezzlement. Cybercrimes also include offenses committed against individuals or groups with the intent to harm the victim's reputation or cause physical or mental harm, directly or indirectly, using modern telecommunication networks such as the internet (e.g., chat rooms, emails) and mobile phones (Muraina & Muraina, 2015).

For the essence of this study, cybercrime refers to a broad range of criminal activities involving the use of computers and internet networks, mostly perpetrated by boys but often aided by the female counterparts. These crimes encompass identity theft, fraud, money laundering,

blackmail, forgery, and embezzlement, as well as actions intended to harm the reputation or well-being of victims through modern telecommunication networks such as the internet and mobile phones.

Types of Cybercrime

The proliferation of digital technologies has not only brought unprecedented opportunities for connectivity and innovation, but it has also given rise to new forms of criminal activity, of which cybercrime is one. Exploring the various forms of cybercrimes is a requisite to developing effective strategies to combat this evolving menace.

Vadza (2013) categorized cybercrimes into the following:

i. Unauthorized Access: This type of cybercrime involves gaining entry into, instructing, or communicating with the resources of a computer, computer system, or computer network without the permission of the rightful owner or the authorized person in charge. It encompasses any form of access to these resources that is conducted without proper authorization.

ii. Hacking & Cracking: This category of cybercrime involves any attempt to gain unauthorized access to a computer or network. Hackers typically use specialized computer programs to breach security measures and infiltrate target systems. Motivations for hacking vary, ranging from personal gain, such as stealing credit card information or transferring funds, to malicious intent, such as damaging systems or inserting viruses or worms. Cracking refers to the unauthorized modification or theft of data, as well as the insertion of malicious software that can harm the system. Additionally, hackers may engage in activities like web hijacking, where they take control of another person's website or web server.

iii. Lottery Frauds: This form of cybercrime involves deceptive letters or emails sent to recipients claiming that they have won a prize in a lottery. To receive the purported winnings, the recipient is instructed to reply and provide their bank details for a direct transfer of funds. Additionally, the email often requests a processing or handling fee. However, in reality, the promised money is never transferred. Instead, the perpetrators swindle the processing fee, and the provided banking details may be used for further fraudulent activities and scams.

iv. Spoofing: This form of cybercrime involves illegal intrusion into a system by impersonating a genuine user. A hacker gains unauthorized access to a computer using a different identity than their own, typically by obtaining a legitimate password. By fooling the computer into believing they are the genuine system operator, the hacker creates a new identity and takes control of the system. This allows them to commit various fraudulent activities using the false identity.

v. Defamation: This involves intentionally harming another person's reputation or good name. It entails actions that tarnish an individual's image, respect, or dignity.

vi. Cyber Stalking: This refers to the repeated harassment or threatening behavior perpetrated by a cybercriminal against a victim using internet services. It involves actions such as following a person's online movements, posting threatening messages on bulletin boards frequented by the victim, entering chat rooms frequented by the victim, and constantly bombarding the victim with emails.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on the Structural Strain and Sex Role Theories

Structural Strain Theory

The Structural Strain Theory's central thesis is that deviance emerges as a result of social strain, which compels individuals, particularly the socially disadvantaged, to stray from social standards. This theory was developed by an American sociologist, R.K. Merton posits that crimes might result from perceived inequalities within the social order. The theory posits that society pressures individuals to achieve socially accepted goals, even if they lack the means to do so. This strain can lead individuals to commit crimes as a way to achieve these goals.

Proponents of this theory also argue that Strain can be classified into two types:

Structural Strain: This refers to macro-level societal processes that influence how individuals perceive their needs. If certain social structures are inherently inadequate or there is insufficient regulation, it may alter individuals' perceptions of means and opportunities.

Individual strain: This refers to the frustration and pressure experienced by individuals as they seek ways to satisfy their needs. When societal goals become significant to an individual, achieving these goals may take precedence over the methods used to attain them.

In respect to cybercrime, structural strain can manifest when societal structures fail to provide adequate opportunities or regulation in the digital space. For example, if there are gaps in cybersecurity laws or insufficient enforcement mechanisms, individuals may perceive a lack of risk or consequences for engaging in cybercriminal activities. This perception can influence their decision-making regarding the means and opportunities for committing cybercrimes. Similarly, on an individual level, strain may arise when individuals experience frustration or pressure to achieve societal goals, such as financial success or social status, through legitimate means. If individuals perceive that they are unable to attain these goals through lawful avenues, they may resort to cybercrime as a means of achieving them. This could involve actions such as online fraud, identity theft, or hacking to gain financial resources or social recognition.

Sex Role Theory

Sex Role Theory posits that gender differences in crime can be attributed to the distinct socialization of boys and girls. This early sociological theory, distinct from feminist perspectives, suggests that boys are more prone to criminal behavior due to their upbringing compared to girls. According to sociologist Edwin Sutherland, girls are socialized in a more supervised and controlled manner, which limits their opportunities for deviance. Conversely, boys are socialized to embrace roughness, toughness, and aggression, predisposing them to deviant behavior. If deviance is tolerated and allowed to persist, it may escalate into criminal conduct. Furthermore, sociologists Talcott Parsons and Robert Bales argue that females, traditionally assigned the "expressive role" in the family, are responsible for nurturing and attending to emotional needs. As a result, girls internalize values such as caring and empathy, which diminishes the likelihood of engaging in criminal acts. A caring and empathetic disposition towards others reduces the propensity to harm them.

METHODOLOGY

The study utilized an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design. This approach accommodates the combination of quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis within a single research project. The design is valuable as it uses qualitative data from an interview to enhance the clarity of the quantitative results. All stakeholders (Officers of EFCC, police officers, and experts in cybersecurity) working towards curbing cybercrime and females within the Ibadan metropolis formed the target population.

Five local governments were purposely sampled in Ibadan metropolis. They comprised Ibadan North, Ibadan North West, Ibadan South, Ibadan South-West, and Ibadan South-East. This is because they are located in the urban centers of Ibadan where some of the higher institutions are located. Purposive sampling technique was used to select two-hundred and sixty-five respondents. Both questionnaire and interview guide were used to solicit information from the respondents.

The administration of the instruments which last for three months was done by the researchers and four trained research assistants. The data generated from the questionnaire was analyzed via simple percentage while the interviews granted were thematically analyzed. The table below contains the sample taken from each of the sampled local governments in Ibadan, Metropolis.

Table 1: Number of Respondents Selected

No	Name	Questionnaire	Interview	Total
1.	Ibadan North	30	3	33
2.	Ibadan North West	30	3	33
3.	Ibadan South	30	3	33
4.	Ibadan South-West	30	3	33
5.	Ibadan South-East	30	3	33
Total		150	15	165

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Research Question I: Are Nigerian girls involved in cybercriminal networks?

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics Showing the Patterns of Girls' Involvement in Cybercriminal Networks.

Items	SA	A	D	SD
Romance scams	120(80%)	30(20%)	0(0%)	0(0%)
Phishing	135(90%)	15(10%)	0(0%)	0(0%)
Online fraud	142(95%)	8(5%)	0(0%)	0(0%)
Identity theft	80(53%)	40(27%)	10(7%)	12(8%)
Cyber-enabled financial crimes	80(53%)	40(27%)	10(7%)	12(8%)

SA -Strongly Agree; A-Agree; D-Disagree; SD-Strongly Agree

Table 1 illustrates the patterns of girls' involvement in cybercriminal networks. The empirical outcomes reveal that these networks frequently engage in various cybercriminal activities,

including romance scams, phishing, online fraud, identity fraud, and cyber-enabled financial crimes. A significant majority of the respondents either strongly agreed or agreed with these findings. Findings from the study show that Nigerian girls are involved in cybercriminal networks. However, the involvement was discovered to be relatively low compared to the male counterparts.

From the qualitative segment, a respondent in the study area stated that:

*Cybercrime activities in Nigeria are predominantly committed by the male gender, popularly called "yahoo boys" though Nigerian girls are not left out of this menace these days. In fact, girls are now becoming major actors in cybercriminal networks (*KII/Anonymous*/Conducted April 2024).*

Another respondent noted that:

*If you do your findings very well, you would discover that Nigerian girls have always been an accomplice in cybercriminal networks, in fact, in most cases, they play substantial but silent roles in fast-tracking cybercrimes (*KII/Anonymous*/Conducted April, 2024).*

In a similar view, another respondent said that:

*Statistics and media evidence have shown that Nigerian girls are co-perpetrators of cybercrime alongside their male counterparts. In fact, in the present day, they get involved either as major actors or as shadow players. As a major player, they independently commit this crime on their own while as a shadow player, they work as a subordinate and accomplice to the male counterparts (*IDI/Anonymous*/Conducted April 2024).*

A respondent stated that:

*It is very true that Nigerian girls are involved in cybercriminal activities. Statistics from previous arrests show their involvement and not just their involvement alone but also the distinct roles they play towards aiding cybercrime. In terms of numbers, it is very evident that the boys dominate this category of crime. This is not debatable. However, our experiences with these young boys have over time exposed the unique roles often played by female cybercriminals (*IDI/Anonymous*/Conducted April 2024).*

Research Question II: What roles do girls play in cybercriminal activities in Nigeria?

A respondent affirmed that:

*Girls have always played a huge role in contributing to cybercriminal networks in Nigeria. One of the major roles is their involvement in "Romance scams" which has remained a complex and troubling issue. These scams typically involve creating fake profiles on dating sites or social media, building emotional connections with victims, and eventually deceiving them into sending money or gifts. Don't forget that the internet provides a sense of anonymity and distance, making it easier for them to justify their actions (*IDI/Anonymous*/Conducted April 2024).*

In a similar view, another respondent stated that:

*Girls usually act as partners in crime to yahoo boys. They are usually being used by their boyfriends who are yahoo boys to swindle clients. Girls make and receive calls for the male counterparts just to deceive their clients and get them scammed (*KII /Anonymous*/ Conducted April 2024).*

Another respondent noted that:

*Girls in Nigeria commit identity fraud and impersonation. It is not difficult to see how Nigerian girls create fake profiles and hack into people's accounts to impersonate individuals, often with the intent of soliciting money or personal information from unsuspecting victims. Most of the time, they pose as someone in need of urgent help, such as a family member or friend, or as someone in a position of authority, like a company executive or government official just to hit their targets very hard (*KII/Anonymous*/Conducted April 2024).*

A respondent affirmed that:

*From a professional context, I can categorically say that, girls in Nigeria and even other climes are major actors when it comes to cybercriminal networking. In Nigeria, girls often take on roles such as "Agent" and "Backup," which are crucial for the execution and success of these networks. Their roles typically involve coordination, communication, and support activities that help sustain the criminal networks. As "Agents," girls are usually responsible for initiating contact with potential victims. This often includes sending phishing emails, making phone calls, or even engaging with targets through social media. Those girls you see cannot be underrated in these criminal acts; they are very skilled at gaining the trust of their victims. Their ability to communicate effectively and empathetically makes them particularly effective in this role. The "Backup" role usually involves providing logistical support to the main actors in the cybercrime operations. This can include managing multiple fake profiles, handling money transfers, or assisting in laundering the proceeds of the scams. Girls in these positions often operate behind the scenes, ensuring that the technical and administrative aspects of the schemes run smoothly (*IDI/Anonymous*/Conducted April 2024).*

From a different perspective, a respondent stated that:

*From what is obtainable in the Nigerian society today, girls are involved in providing psychological support to cybercriminals. These girls often take on domestic roles, such as cooking, cleaning, and other household chores, to support the so-called "Yahoo boys" engagement in various forms of online fraud. In many cases, these girls are also subjected to being used as sex tools, effectively acting as companions to ensure that the cybercriminals remain psychologically stable and focused on their illicit activities (*KII/Anonymous*/Conducted April 2024).*

Research Question III: What are the motivating factors for girls' involvement in cybercriminal activities in Nigeria?

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics Showing the Motivating Factors for Girls' Involvement in Cybercriminal Activities in Nigeria

Items	SA	A	D	SD
Increased access to education	135(90%)	15(10%)	0(0%)	0(0%)
Increased access to technology	140(93%)	10(7%)	0(0%)	0(0%)
Economic empowerment and financial independence	140(93%)	10(7%)	0(0%)	0(0%)
Social factor like gender dynamics	142(95%)	8(5%)	0(0%)	0(0%)
Social factor such as peer pressure	120(80%)	30(20%)	0(0%)	0(0%)
The anonymity and freedom offered by the internet	135(90%)	15(10%)	0(0%)	0(0%)

An examination of the factors that motivate Nigerian girls to engage in cybercrime is presented in Table 3. The empirical results showed that the majority of participants strongly agreed and agreed with the proposition that girls' increased access to western education, technology, means to economic empowerment and financial independence, gender dynamics, peer pressure, and the anonymity and freedom offered by the internet are the motivating factors that facilitate their involvement in cybercriminal activities.

A respondent stated that:

*Economic vulnerability is one of the most significant motivating factors driving girls to engage in cybercriminal activities in Nigeria. The harsh economic realities faced by many young women create a fertile ground for such involvement. You and I know that Nigeria faces high unemployment rates, particularly among the youth. Young women, in particular, often struggle to find stable, well-paying jobs. This lack of economic opportunity pushes many to seek alternative means of income, even if it involves illegal activities (*KII/Anonymous*/Conducted April 2024).*

Similarly, another respondent also affirmed that:

*Poverty is still very prevalent in Nigeria. Many girls come from impoverished backgrounds where financial pressure is massive. The need to support themselves and their families often push them to cybercrime as a desperate measure to escape poverty. The lure of quick and substantial financial gains can be incredibly tempting in such circumstances (*KII/Anonymous*/Conducted April 2024).*

Put differently, a respondent noted that:

*Peer group influence has always been a strong motivation for both girls and boys to commit crimes. We should also not forget that economic vulnerability strongly makes young women susceptible to peer pressure and social influence. Seeing peers who have found financial success through cybercrime and other crimes can make it appear as a legitimate or even desirable path. I would say that the perceived glamor and status associated with ill-gotten wealth can be powerful motivators to girls (*KII/Anonymous*/Conducted April 2024).*

Research Question IV: What are the socio-economic implications of Nigerian girls' involvement in cybercriminal networks?

A respondent stated that:

Without a doubt, the involvement of girls in cybercriminal networks negatively affects their educational life. Many of these girls who are involved in cybercrime abandon their education to engage in illegal activities. This disruption in their education not only hampers their intellectual and personal development but also diminishes their future job prospects. Without a solid educational foundation, their ability to transition to legitimate and sustainable careers is severely limited (KII/Anonymous/*Conducted April 2024*).

Another respondent noted that:

*The involvement of girls in cybercriminal activities usually has psychological implications on them. The stress and anxiety associated with living a double life and the constant fear of being caught usually take a significant toll on their mental health. Girls involved in cybercrime are likely to experience higher levels of stress, anxiety, and depression. The psychological burden of engaging in deceitful activities and harming others can also lead to feelings of guilt and shame (*KII/Anonymous/*Conducted April 2024*).

Put differently, another respondent stated that:

*When young women engage in cybercrime instead of pursuing education or legitimate employment, it results in a loss of productivity for the economy. The potential contributions they could have made in various professional fields are lost, which hampers economic growth and development (*KII/Anonymous/*Conducted April 2024*).

Another respondent stated that:

*Most girls have been victims of ritual killings due to their lack of contentment. This has resulted in the loss of many potential resources. The truth of the matter is that, there is nothing like yahoo-yahoo again, we now have yahoo +, where these young guys now go extra miles in the name of swindling people. (*KII/Anonymous/*Conducted April 2024*).

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The study verifies the involvement of girls in cybercriminal networks in Ibadan Metropolis, Oyo State, Nigeria. It also highlights the patterns of girls' involvement in these cybercriminal activities. The empirical result validates the involvement of girls in cybercriminal networks; however, the involvement of girls was discovered to be relatively low to the involvement of boys in the study area. Results from the empirical findings also unveiled that girls in the study area play an active role in cybercriminal networks, the involvement of girls in cybercriminal activities were discovered to include; romance scams, phishing, online fraud, identity fraud, and cyber-enabled financial crimes. Findings from the qualitative segment also corroborate the empirical outcome; however, from the qualitative segment, findings showed that girls in the study area also provide psychological support to the male counterparts to aid the effective and smooth running of the networks. The psychological involvement includes rendering domestic chores such as washing clothes and also cooking for the male counterparts. Another perception

in respect to the psychological involvement of girls is acting as sex tools for the male cybercriminals which was noted to be prevalent in the study area. The above findings resonate with the work of Ogunleye, Ojedokun and Aderinto (2019) which affirmed the participation of female students in cyber-fraud activities. This result underscores the involvement of girls in cybercriminal networks. This finding also aligns with the submission of Jegede, Elegbeleye, Olowookere and Olorunyomi (2016) affirming that female involvement in crime is limited compared to the range of crimes committed by men. However, advancements in modern technology have significantly increased the participation of women in criminal activities.

Another significant example highlighting the involvement of females in cybercriminal activities is reported by Augoye (2020) in Premium Times News. The Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) brought charges against Adedamola Rukayat, a prominent Nigerian social media influencer widely known as Adeherself. This case was arraigned before Justice Sherifat Solebo at the Special Offence Court in Ikeja, Lagos. Rukayat was charged with possession of fraudulent documents. This incident underscores the active participation of young women in cybercriminal networks, breaking traditional gender norms and pointing towards a broader trend of female engagement in digital fraud.

Findings from the study also unveiled the motivating factors for girls' involvement in cybercriminal activities in the study area. The empirical results indicated that increased access to Western education, technology, economic empowerment and financial independence, gender dynamics, peer pressure, and the anonymity and freedom of the internet are motivating factors facilitating girls' involvement in cybercriminal activities.

The qualitative segment unveiled the motivating factors of girls' involvement in cybercrime in the study area to include; economic vulnerability, poverty and peer group influence. The above findings align with the assertion of Abdulkareem (2009), who affirms that cybercrime in Nigeria stems from poverty, unemployment, and corruption. He highlights that Nigeria's harsh economic conditions, including widespread youth unemployment, have driven many young people to use social media platforms like Yahoo Mail, Google Chat, WhatsApp, Badoo, Instagram, and Facebook to defraud unsuspecting victims. Additionally, these economic pressures have led to other serious crimes such as kidnapping, murder, and stalking. It is widely agreed that most of the youths arrested for these crimes come from poor backgrounds and are unemployed. The result also corroborates the submission of Muraina and Muraina (2015), who note that peer influence is a major factor that motivates individuals to commit cybercrime.

The involvement of girls in cybercriminal networks presents multifaceted challenges that extend beyond the immediate illegal activities. It disrupts their educational trajectories, inflicts severe psychological damage, hampers economic development, and sometimes leads to tragic outcomes such as ritual killings. A study by Adegbola and Fadara (2022) indicated that cybercrime instigates bad behavior among students. The research observed that students involved in cybercrime exhibited poor academic engagement, such as arriving late to class, refusing to complete assignments, and neglecting their studies. The study also affirmed that cybercrime negatively influences students' academic performance, leading to outcomes such as examination malpractice, low grades, and school dropout. Furthermore, the implications of cybercrime on girls include disruptions to their education and adverse effects on their mental health.

CONCLUSION

The research validates girls' involvement in cybercriminal networks in the study area, revealing their diverse roles which range from facilitators to active perpetrators. Motivations for involvement often stem from a combination of socio-economic pressures, peer influence, and the allure of financial gain. The socio-economic implications for these girls are profound, as engagement in cybercrime not only disrupts their educational paths but also adversely affects their future prospects. The detrimental impacts include academic disengagement, low academic performance, and increased dropout rates, which further perpetuate cycles of poverty and social instability. To address these issues, targeted interventions focusing on education, mental health support, and socio-economic empowerment are crucial in mitigating the risks and providing alternative pathways for at-risk girls.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are offered to address the involvement of girls in cybercriminal networks in Ibadan Metropolis, Oyo State, Nigeria:

1. Towards addressing the involvement of girls in cybercriminal networks, there is a need to implement comprehensive awareness programs in schools to educate students about the risks and consequences of cybercrime, specifically targeting young girls.

2. Stakeholders, such as the government, private individuals, communities, and Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), should prioritize the development of vocational training programs to provide alternative income-generating opportunities for girls, reducing economic vulnerability and the lure of cybercrime.

3. Governments at all levels should partner with technology institutions to develop and implement robust monitoring and reporting systems to detect and prevent cybercriminal activities.

4. There is a need to also establish counseling and support services in schools and communities to address the psychological impacts of cybercrime involvement and provide mental health support for girls.

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