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Cybervictimisation and Adolescent Boys

As the world has become increasingly enmeshed with the internet and digital technologies, so too has the role of the parent. In this study, Molly and Jaimee explored how a parent's internet supervision strategies effected adolescent boy's experiences with cybervictimisation, and the contextual factors that can influence the effectiveness of that internet supervision.

What was known:

Within the parenting literature, two broad strategies have been identified for supervising children's media consumption. Active supervision describes a strategy of promoting critical engagement with media, through discussion and education about the risks and benefits of a media-source. Restrictive supervision, on the other hand, describes the institution of rules, and restrictions about media consumption, up to and including content and duration restrictions. These strategies have proven to be effective in reducing viewing time and exposure to proscribed content (restrictive), and reducing aggressive behaviour and substance-use (active). When applied to internet-use, however, protective effects may be less consistent, and the literature is divided on whether active supervision, restrictive supervision, or both, are consistently protective or exacerbating toward the specific risk of cybervictimisation.

What was asked:

While both boys and girls can become cyberbullies, young men's experiences with cyberbullying may be unique. Moreso than girls, boys are likely to *become* cyberbullies after being cybervictims, and the effects on their functioning can be pronounced – male cybervictims are at risk of substance abuse, delinquency, and self-esteem damage. Despite these serious outcomes, however, and the markedly different ways boys use the internet compared to girls, little research has examined whether active or restrictive supervision can be effective for boys *specifically* in reducing cybervictimisation. Thus, in this study it was asked, *to what extent is internet supervision associated with cybervictimisation in adolescent boys?*

Further, little work has been done to identify the home-level factors that might influence the efficacy of those internet supervision strategies. Thus, it was also asked, *Do internet-use and the number of internet-enabled devices in the home affect the efficacy of internet supervision?*

What was done

295 boys (average age of 13.44) from an Australian all-boys private school took part in a survey in 2019. The data was analysed through moderated regression analysis, and two interactions were found. Boys subject to active supervision experienced more cybervictimisation when they had access to fewer devices, while boys subject to restrictive supervision experienced more cybervictimisation when they had access to fewer devices while experiencing high levels of internet use.

What was found

Despite previous research suggesting that active supervision should be protective against cyberbullying, the inverse was true – increasing active supervision was found to predict more experiences of cybervictimisation. It was suggested that this might be due to contextual factors: these boys were drawn from an all-boys private school, a highly specific social context which has been found to be both high in bullying generally, and resistant to interventions to prevent bullying. However, this effect was contingent on the presence of devices: only boys with *fewer* devices experienced this increased risk. It was proposed that this may be due to digital literacy effects, or the confidence and ease with which people use internet technologies in daily life. Digital literacy has been found to

have a positive relationships with access to devices in previous studies, suggesting that as device ownership rises, so too does digital literacy. As a result of having fewer devices, these boys may simply have had fewer opportunities to enrich their digital literacy skills and implement the protective, critical thinking skills that active supervision is designed to impart. At the same time, fewer devices may indicate that parents are lacking in these skills also: despite best efforts to use active supervision, they may be poorly equipped to teach the skills necessary for boys to stay safe online
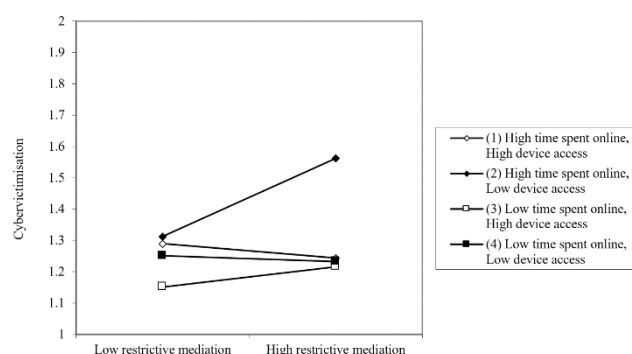
For restrictive supervision, when boys had access to fewer devices but high levels of online use, increasing restrictive supervision was found to predict more cybervictimisation. This was suggested to be a result of reactance theory – having demonstrated a high desire to engage with the internet, but had their ability to do so constrained by both fewer devices and higher restrictions, these boys might engage in risky behaviours despite their parents rules, placing themselves at higher risk for cybervictimisation. That this didn't happen when boys had low internet usage was suggested to be a result of low desire to engage with the internet generally. Boys who had both high internet usage and more devices in the home may instead be benefitting from both increased difficulty in enforcing restrictive supervision across many devices on the part of parents, and an increase in self-taught digital literacy skills, enabled by more opportunities to engage with the digital world.

Implications of this work

This study has shown that the effects of internet supervision upon cybervictimisation may be implicitly contextual. Implementing effective internet supervision need to extend beyond the idea of the adolescent on their phone or computer being passively given rules, guidelines, or consequences, and instead take a holistic view: the child's social context, their access to technologies, and how, when, or why parents are choosing to employ parental internet supervision. Investigating internet supervision without considering these contexts may lead to flawed conclusions for the efficacy of internet supervision within distinct adolescent populations.

Speechley, M., & Stuart, J. (2022). The Conditional Effects of Parental Internet Supervision on Online Victimization for Early Adolescent Boys. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*. https://doi.org/10.1080/08838151.2022.2099394