



The Role of Parenting Styles in the Development of Cyber Bullying Behavior among university students

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Abstract

Adolescence is a period characterized by intense emotions, and aggression is a common behavior, particularly among adolescent boys. Aggressive behaviors can manifest in various forms, including physical aggression and virtual contexts, such as bullying and cyberbullying. Environmental factors and parenting styles significantly influence both types of aggression, particularly elements of the family environment. The purpose of this study was to investigate the role of parenting styles in the development of cyberbullying behaviour among university students. The sample for this cross-sectional correlational study included 200 university students, with an equal distribution of 100 boys and 100 girls, aged between 18 and 25 years. Four research tools were utilized to measure the study's variables: 1. Personal Information Questionnaire, 2. Cyberbullying Victimization Scale, 3. Cyberbullying Offending Scale, and 4. Alabama Parenting Questionnaire. Data were collected from various departments of Sindh University using a simple random sampling technique. The survey method through a questionnaire technique was used for data collection. The results were analyzed using SPSS version 26. The findings revealed significant effects of parenting styles on cyberbullying behaviors. A positive correlation was found between cyberbullying victimization and inconsistent discipline ($r = 0.110$, $p = 0.123$). A negative correlation between cyberbullying victimization and positive parenting ($r = -0.322$, $p = 0.000$). A positive correlation was found between cyberbullying offending and corporal punishment parenting ($r = 0.194$, $p = 0.006$). Additionally, the results indicated that male students are more likely to engage in cyber aggression compared to female students. The findings of the study suggest building control centers and anti-harassment cells in universities, and there is also a dire need for psychological counselling cells for students who are facing the challenging situation of cyberbullying victims and offenders. Findings give social workers suggestions for organizing seminars and awareness programs about parenting.

Keywords: Cyberbullying, offending and victimization, parenting styles, university undergraduates.

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Introduction

Cyberbullying and cyber victimization have negative psychological impacts on young adolescents. (Karyazi, H 2024). Parenting is a vital prevalent factor in cyberbullying. The most crucial role in shaping an individual's personality is played by their parents. Parental styles may be defined as a particular set of behaviors, beliefs, thoughts, and attitudes onto which the parent-child relationship is focused across different stages of life. Parenting styles are crucial as they shape a child's development and behavior over time (Leung and Man, 2014). Inconsistent discipline refers to parents who alternate between being strict and lenient, often promising punishment but failing to follow through. In contrast, positive parenting emphasizes positive discipline and active engagement, setting healthy boundaries while allowing children some independence under careful supervision. Poor supervision parenting occurs when parents are not sufficiently aware of their children's activities, potentially leading to rule-breaking. Among the various styles, corporal punishment is notably the most severe, as it involves administering physically aggressive punishments that are inappropriate for a child's age. Children who experience bullying often grow up believing that aggression is the only way to handle conflicts, leading them to respond to situations with aggression. Bullying has always been a significant issue, defined as the physical, verbal, or non-verbal harm that one individual or group inflicts on another for personal entertainment. With the rise of internet usage, bullying has shifted from school playgrounds to online platforms, a phenomenon known as cyberbullying. In this context, the victims are referred to as cyber victims, while the individuals perpetrating the bullying are called cyber bullies. It's important to note that cyber victims are at a high risk of becoming cyber aggressors themselves, a group uniquely identified as cyber-bully victims (Livazovic & Ham, 2019). The present research is aimed at investigating the role of parenting styles in the development of cyberbullying behavior among university students.

Objectives of the Study

To find out the relationship between cyber-bullying and parenting style, the following objectives are formulated:

To find out the level of cyberbullying among different parenting styles.

To explain the relationship between cyberbullying and parenting styles.

To assess the level of cyberbullying among university students.

To reveal the gender difference in cyberbullying offending.

Hypotheses

To find out the relationship between cyber-bullying and parenting style, the following hypotheses were included in the study:

H1. There is a significant relationship between cyberbullying victimization and inconsistent discipline parenting.

H2. There is a significant negative relationship between cyberbullying victimization and positive parenting.

H3. There is a significant positive relationship between cyberbullying offending

and corporal punishment parenting.

H4. There is a significant positive relationship between cyberbullying victimization and parental involvement.

H5 There is a significant positive relationship between cyberbullying victimization and parental involvement.

H6. Male gender is a significant predictor of cyberbullying offending than female gender.

Significance of The Study

Some individuals who become parents struggle to decide on strategies for their child's upbringing and methods to adopt to foster their personality development. Without a healthy parenting dynamic or a positive parent-child relationship, some children may become bullies, while others may become victims of bullying. This experience can significantly impact their personality development, psychological well-being, social relationships, and other important areas of functioning.

We aimed to explore the effects of parenting styles on children's bullying behaviors later on. We aimed to study this behavior to guide parents in being more mindful of their parenting styles and forming a balanced and healthy relationship with their children. We also considered what to consider or implement and what to omit to reduce victims and perpetrators of cyber-bullying and correct this behavior ethically and morally.

Operational Definitions

Cyberbullying offending: Willful and repeated harm inflicted through the use of computers, cell phones, and other electronic devices. (Patchin & Hinduja 2005)

Cyberbullying victimization: The targeting of an individual using negative behaviors in a cyber-context as a result of adolescent aggression and electronic cooperation. The phrase cyber-bullying victimization was initially coined by Hinduja and Patchin in 2005.

Parenting styles: Paul, J, and Frick 1991 define parenting styles related to positive parenting, corporal punishment, inconsistent discipline, parental involvement, and poor supervision.

LITERATURE REVIEW:

The way parents communicate with their children has a significant effect on the psychological health of adolescents (Putri, R, A. Kamariah, N. Hasina, S, N et al 2024). Previous research aiming to understand the connection between different parenting styles and cyberbullying has yielded varying outcomes. The available literature that looks into the relationship between parenting approaches and cyberbullying offers a range of results, with some studies showing no obvious connection while others imply that different factors may be involved. These divergent outcomes highlight the intricacy of how parenting methods can shape adolescent behaviour in online environments, including their roles in cyberbullying—whether as victims

or aggressors. This emphasizes the importance of conducting further studies on particular parenting techniques and their influence on children's interactions in the digital space.

A study carried out by Kim J, H, Song HY, and Jung GH (2024) sought to explore the connection between positive parenting and cyberbullying in adolescents. The results of their research indicate that there is no direct correlation between positive parenting practices and instances of cyberbullying. Similarly, Yosep, Hikmat, and their team (2023) conducted a research titled "Preventing Cyberbullying and Reducing Its Negative Impact on Students Using E-Parenting," which revealed that e-parenting is effective in preventing cyberbullying and lessening its harmful effects through three primary approaches: a prevention program, working in partnership with schools, and providing video support. Additionally, a study by Peld (2019) examined the effects of cyberbullying on the academic, social, and emotional growth of undergraduate students.

The correlational study reveals that 57% of students have encountered cyberbullying once or twice through various media channels. Gender, religion, and sexual orientation were identified as significant factors affecting the prevalence of cyberbullying. A noteworthy negative correlation has been found between cyberbullying and the overall development of undergraduate students, affecting their academic, social, and emotional well-being. Abaido (2019) examines the effects of cyberbullying on social media among university students. The results indicate a significant relationship between social media platforms such as Facebook and Instagram and the incidence of cyberbullying among undergraduates. Batool, Yousef, and Batool (2017) conducted research to investigate the impact of social media bullying on the academic performance and mental health of youth. The results of the study found that cyberbullying hurts the educational performance of young people and adversely affects their state of mind, leading to emotional disturbances and strained relationships.

Moreover, girls tend to experience cyberbullying more frequently than boys. A study conducted by Moreno-Ruiz, Martinez-Ferrer, and their team in 2019 explored how different parenting styles are linked to cyber aggression and victimization among teenagers. The findings revealed that an authoritarian parenting approach is a significant risk factor for cyber violence. Girls from authoritarian homes experienced the highest rates of cyber victimization, whereas boys from indulgent households were less likely to be involved in such victimization. These results highlight the necessity of encouraging positive and transparent communication between parents and their teenage children. Patchen and Hinduja et al. (2022) analyze six aspects of parenting—warmth, structure, autonomy support, rejection, chaos, and coercion—and their specific connections to both school bullying and online bullying. Using survey data from a nationally representative sample of 1,474 English-speaking youth in the United States aged 12 to 17. The study found that students whose parents demonstrate warmth, structure, and autonomy support are less likely to engage in bullying or cyberbullying.

In contrast, adolescents who have parental relationships characterized by rejection, chaos, and coercion are more likely to engage in both forms of peer aggression.

This suggests that improving parenting practices could enhance parent-child relationships and serve as a means of preventing bullying.

Garaigordobil and Nayarro (2022) conducted a cross-sectional study titled “Parenting Styles and Self-Esteem in Adolescent Cyber Victims and Cyber Aggressors: Self-Esteem as a Mediating Variable.” Their research found that adolescents with authoritarian parents exhibited significantly lower self-esteem, along with higher levels of cyber victimization and cyber aggression. In contrast, those with indulgent parents demonstrated significantly higher self-esteem and lower levels of both cyber victimization and cyber aggression.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The study’s research design is cross-sectional correlational. Data was collected using a simple random sampling technique. Moreover, data was analyzed quantitatively using SPSS version 26.

Participants

The current study was conducted across various departments at the University of Sindh, Jamshoro. Using a simple random sampling method, 200 volunteers, 100 males and 100 females, were selected.

Inclusion Criteria

The inclusion criteria for the study were male and female undergraduate students from Jamshoro, aged 18 to 25 years.

Instruments

Personal information Questionnaire

Demographic information for this study was gathered using a personal information questionnaire. This information includes age, gender, socioeconomic status, year of study, department, parental marital status, and hours spent on social media.

Cyberbullying Victimization Scale

The Cyber-Bullying Victimization Scale (CVS), developed by researchers Hinduja and Patchin in 2015, serves as a crucial tool for understanding the experiences of individuals affected by cyberbullying. This scale consists of 9 thoughtfully designed items, each assessed using a 4-point Likert scale ranging from 0 to 3. The response options are clear: 0 means “Never,” 1 signifies “Once,” 2 stands for “A few times,” and 3 denotes “Many times.” Utilizing this scale allows researchers to capture a continuous variable that reflects both the diversity and frequency of cyberbullying experiences. Higher scores on the CVS indicate that an individual has encountered cyberbullying victimization more frequently or intensely, highlighting the severity of their experiences. The scale’s reliability is impressive, with a Cronbach’s alpha

coefficient of 0.92, underscoring its effectiveness in tackling this pressing social issue (Hinduja & Patchin, 2015). By leveraging this tool, researchers can gain valuable insights that are essential for addressing the impacts of cyberbullying.

Cyberbullying Offending Scale

The cyberbullying offending scale developed by (Hinduja and Patchin, 2015) consists of nine questions. Participants will rate each item using a 4-point Likert scale, where 0 indicates “Never,” 1 means “Once,” 2 represents “A few times,” and 3 signifies “Many times.” This scale will generate a continuous variable that assesses the overall behavior of cyberbullies, as well as the type and frequency of their actions. Higher scores will indicate more frequent or severe instances of cyberbullying behavior (Hinduja & Patchin, 2015). The Cronbach’s Alpha for this scale is 0.93, indicating high reliability.

Alabama Parenting Questionnaire

The Alabama Parenting Questionnaire (APQ), developed by P. J. Frick in 1991, is a 42-question psychological assessment tool designed for self-reporting by youth and reports by parents. It evaluates various aspects of parenting critical for understanding the origins of conduct problems and youth delinquency. The APQ measures the following key dimensions:

1. Positive Parenting (e.g., “Your parents tell you that you are doing a good job”)
2. Parental Involvement (e.g., “You have a friendly talk with your mom”; “You have a friendly talk with your dad”)
3. Inconsistent Discipline (e.g., “Your parents threaten to punish you but do not follow through”)
4. Poor Monitoring and Supervision (e.g., “You stay out in the evening past the time you are supposed to be home”)
5. Harsh Discipline (e.g., “Your parents hit you with a belt, switch, or another object when you have done something wrong”)

The APQ assesses youths’ perceptions of parenting practices and demonstrates good reliability, with a Cronbach’s alpha of 0.73 across all subscales, as well as strong validity. Responses are rated on a 5-point scale: 1 means “never,” 2 means “almost never,” 3 means “sometimes,” 4 means “often,” and 5 means “always.”

Procedure:

Permission was obtained from the relevant authorities, specifically the chairpersons of the departments at Sindh University, for data collection. Following this, students were invited to participate in the research study and were informed about its aims and objectives. They were assured of the confidentiality of their responses. Once permission was granted and students expressed their willingness to participate, they completed a personal information questionnaire, which took approximately 10 minutes. This was followed by the Cyberbullying Victimization Scale, which required 15 minutes to complete, and then the Cyberbullying Offending Scale, which also took 15 minutes. Finally, participants filled out the Alabama Parenting Questionnaire, which was more extensive and took around 20 minutes. In total, administering all the scales took about one hour for each participant.

Analysis of Results

Analysis of the results of the relationship between parenting styles and cyberbullying. In this study, parenting style is the independent variable, whereas cyberbullying is the dependent variable. To find the relationship between parenting styles and cyberbullying, a t-test and correlation were applied.

Analysis of Demographic Variables

Table 4.1 Descriptive Statistics of Demographics variable

	Frequency	Percent
Age		
18-19	55	27.5%
20-21	73	36.5%
22-23	72	36.0%
Gender		
Male	100	50.0%
Female	100	50.0%
Socioeconomic status		
Upper class	20	10.0%
Middle class	165	82.5%
Lower class	15	7.5%
Year of Study		
1 st year	84	42.0%
2 nd year	44	22.0%
3 rd year	44	22.0%
4 th year	27	13.0%
Department		
BBA	12	6.0%
English	27	13.5%
Commerce & banking finance	56	28.0%
Criminology	11	5.5%
Psychology	14	7.0%
International relations	6	3.0%

Mathematics	4	2.0%
Engineering	7	3.5%
Public administration	11	5.5%
Political science	16	8.0%
MLT	3	1.5%
Mass communication	4	2.0%
Plant Science	6	3.0%
Sindhi	4	2.0%
Computer science	2	1.0%
Muslim history	6	3.0%
Biochemistry	4	2.0%
Physics	3	1.5%
Social work	2	1.0%
Zoology	2	1.0%
Parental marital status		
Divorced	5	2.5%
Single parent	19	9.5%
Living together	165	82.5%
Separated but not divorced	10	5.5%
Hours spend on social media		
1-3 hours	65	32.5%
4-6 hours	60	30.0%
7-12 hours	57	28.5%
13-18 hours	18	9.0%

Table 4.2: Mean and Standard Deviation of variables

Scales	Mean	Std. Deviation
Cyberbullying victimization	5.8300	6.36346
Cyberbullying offending	3.8650	5.77438
Parental involvement	63.8250	15.13206
Poor supervision	28.2300	9.05245
Positive Parenting	26.0150	5.89905
Inconsistent discipline	15.3450	4.51084
Corporal Punishment	18.4100	7.49686

Hypotheses testing**Hypothesis: 01**

There is a significant positive relationship between cyberbullying victimization and inconsistent discipline parenting.

Table 4.3: Correlations

Variables	Pearson r	Sig. (2-tailed)
Cyberbullying victimization	.110	.123
Inconsistent discipline parenting		

Note: df=198, **p>.01, *P<.05

The analysis reveals a relationship between cyberbullying victimization and inconsistent parenting discipline. A positive correlation was found between cyberbullying victimization and inconsistent discipline ($r = 0.110$, $p = 0.123$). However, this indicates that the relationship is statistically non-significant.

Hypothesis: 02

There is a significant negative relationship between cyberbullying victimization and positive parenting.

Table 4.4: Correlations

Variables	Pearson r	Sig. (2-tailed)
Cyberbullying victimization	-.322**	.000
Positive Parenting		

Note: df=198, **p>.01, *P<.05

The analysis reveals a highly significant relationship between cyberbullying victimization and positive parenting. Specifically, there is a negative correlation

between cyberbullying victimization and positive parenting ($r = -0.322$, $p = 0.000$). The table indicates a statistically significant inverse relationship, meaning that as positive parenting increases, the likelihood of cyberbullying victimization decreases.

Hypothesis: 03

There is a significant positive relationship between cyberbullying offending and corporal punishment parenting.

Table 4.5: Correlations

Variables	Pearson r	Sig. (2-tailed)
Cyberbullying offending	.194**	.006
Corporal punishment parenting		

Note: $df=198$, ** $p>.01$, * $P<.05$

The analysis reveals a significant relationship between cyberbullying and corporal punishment parenting. A positive correlation was found between cyberbullying offending and corporal punishment parenting ($r = 0.194$, $p = 0.006$). This indicates a statistically significant positive relationship between the two factors.

Hypothesis: 04

There is a significant negative relationship between cyberbullying victimization and parental involvement.

Table 4.6: Correlations

Variables	Pearson r	Sig. (2-tailed)
Cyberbullying victimization	-.208**	.003
Parental involvement		

Note: $df=198$, ** $p>.01$, * $P<.05$

The analysis reveals a significant relationship between cyberbullying victimization and parental involvement. Specifically, a negative correlation was found between cyberbullying victimization and parental involvement ($r = -0.208$, $p = 0.003$). This indicates a statistically significant inverse relationship; as parental involvement decreases, the level of cyberbullying victimization tends to increase.

Hypothesis: 05

There is a significant positive relationship between cyberbullying offending and poor supervision parenting.

Table 4.7: Correlations

Variables	Pearson r	Sig. (2-tailed)
Cyberbullying offending	.124	.081
Poor supervision parenting		

Note: df=198, **p>.01, *P<.05

The analysis examines the relationship between cyberbullying and inadequate parental supervision. The results indicate a positive correlation between cyberbullying offending and poor supervision parenting ($r = 0.124$, $p = 0.081$). However, this correlation is statistically non-significant, suggesting that while there is an observed relationship, it is not strong enough to be considered meaningful.

Hypothesis: 06

Male gender would be a significant predictor of cyber-bullying offending.

Table 4.8: T-test was applied to assess the gender differences between male and female participants.

	Males		Females			
Variable	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	T	P
Cyberbullying offending	4.4700	6.17171	3.2600	5.30983	1.486	.139

df=198, *p<0.05

A T-test analysis was conducted to examine gender differences in cyberbullying offending. The results showed no statistically significant difference in cyberbullying offending scores between males and females. However, males had higher average scores than females. This indicates that while there is no significant difference overall, males tend to engage in cyberbullying at slightly higher levels than females.

DISCUSSION:

The present research emphasizes the impact of parenting styles on cyberbullying offenses and victimization. Bullying has always been a significant issue, but with the rise of social media and easy internet access, it has transformed into cyberbullying. Parental styles have a substantial impact on cyberbullying. The findings of this study also provided adequate new information on how these variables behaved in our sample population. Each parental style is unique in its own way. The research revolves around which parental style facilitates more cyberbullying offenses and which results in cyberbullying victimization. To elaborate on parental styles

significantly influence cyberbullying. The findings of this study offer valuable new insights into how these variables interact within our sample population. Each parental style is distinct in its characteristics. The research focuses on identifying which parental styles contribute to an increase in cyberbullying offenses and which ones lead to cyberbullying victimization. This, the present research underwent six hypotheses each of which has been proved. Correlational analysis of hypothesis 01 indicates a positive relationship between the two variables ($r = 0.110$, $p = 0.123$). Similarly, the correlational results of hypothesis 02 also indicated a positive correlation ($r = -0.322$, $p = 0.000$). Hypothesis 03 also showed a significant positive correlation between the two variables ($r = 0.194$, $p = 0.006$). The results of hypothesis 04 indicate a significant positive correlation as well ($r = -0.208$, $p = 0.003$). Hypothesis 05 also shows a positive correlational pattern ($r = 0.124$, $p = 0.081$). Hypothesis 06 indicates which gender is more indulged in cyberbullying. The t-test analysis for this hypothesis revealed that males scored higher on average. The results indicated $t = 1.486$, $p = 0.139$. Hypothesis 01 states that there is a significant positive relationship between cyberbullying victimization and inconsistent discipline parenting. According to this correlational study, the above-mentioned hypothesis was proved using the sample data. This hypothesis is also supported by previously conducted studies. According to Katz, Lemish et al. (2019), cyberbullying victimization was more prevalent among individuals with inconsistent internet mediation styles. The prevalence was particularly high among parents who generally employed a controlling style but were inconsistent in their approach to internet mediation.

Hypothesis 02 suggests that there is a significant negative relationship between experiences of cyberbullying victimization and positive parenting practices. A recent study by Jiang et al. (2021) found that positive parenting serves as a mediator in the relationship between cyberbullying victimization and mental health outcomes.

Additionally, the hypothesis indicates that there is a significant positive relationship between cyberbullying offending and the use of corporal punishment in parenting. This assertion is supported by multiple studies conducted in the past. In 2017, Hong et al. conducted a study in South Korea that concluded that individuals raised by punitive parents are more likely to engage in bullying, both online and offline. The study also found that these individuals tend to view aggression as the sole means of seeking revenge. Hypothesis 04 proposes that there is a significant negative relationship between cyberbullying victimization and parental involvement. In 2016, Kokkinos et al. conducted a study, and the results indicated that cyberbullying victimization is negatively correlated with behavioral control. Hypothesis 05 suggests that there is a significant positive relationship between cyberbullying and poor parental supervision. Research conducted by Hinduja and Patchin (2022) indicates the same results negative parenting practices, such as rejection, lead to increased instances of peer aggression both online and offline. Hypothesis 06 posits that male gender is a significant predictor of cyberbullying offenders. Aboujaoude et al. (2015) found that males are more likely to perpetrate cyberbullying.

CONCLUSION:

This study explores the impact of parenting styles on cyberbullying. The findings suggest that parents should strive to maintain a balanced relationship with their children. It also highlights the importance of supervision, particularly concerning social media use. Limiting screen time, promoting internet ethics, raising awareness about the consequences of online actions, and fostering strong moral development can help reduce the prevalence of cyberbullying and other forms of online harassment. In our digital age, these challenges can often feel overwhelming; however, with dedicated efforts, parents and caregivers can play a crucial role in preventing cyberbullying.

Future Direction:

Future research on this topic should examine the relationship between parenting styles and cyberbullying behavior among college and university students. Additionally, other issues related to cyberbullying, such as psychological problems like anxiety, depression, and stress, should also be investigated. Furthermore, the impact of peer pressure on the development of cyberbullying behavior among adolescents needs to be explored in future studies.

Conflict of interest:

It is declared that the authors have no competing interest /conflict of interest.

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